

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Soroh Chayah *bas* Shmuel *a”h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Last Hurrah

PARSHAS TETZAVEH 5777

R’ Moshe Aharon Stern, venerated Mashgiach of the Kaminetz Yeshivah, related the following account, which serves as a powerful lesson in patience. The story involves an individual who, unfortunately, was notorious for just the opposite. He was an elderly man, somewhat (or significantly so) on the cranky side, with a penchant for making his displeasure known.

***Gragger* Grief**

Purim would roll around, and this would present a serious challenge for the protagonist. The issue involved the well-known *halachah* regarding the mitzvah of the day, the reading of Megillas Esther, as recorded in the Mishnah (*Megillah* 2:3):

מֵהֵיכָן קוֹרֵא אָדָם אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה וְיוֹצֵא בָּהּ יָדָיו חוֹבְתָנוּ? רַבִּי מֵאִיר אָמַר: כְּלָהּ.

“From which point in the Megillah must one read in order to discharge his obligation? R’ Meir says: (He must read) its entirety.”

It is for this reason that *halachah* is quite strict when it comes to conversation during the Megillah reading. A person only fulfills the mitzvah, as stated, if he hears *the entirety* of the reading. By talking even minimally while the reading is in progress, one seriously jeopardizes the fulfillment of his obligation; by missing even one word of the reading – which could be drowned out by his speech – his mitzvah remains unfulfilled.

It was the prevalent practice amongst the youngsters that presented the greatest problem for this man. As is their wont, much noise would issue forth from the children upon the mention of Haman’s name – much to the annoyance of this elderly man. Under normal circumstances, such outbursts would evoke a grand display of consternation on his part. But this time, the mitzvah of the day left him with no choice but to tolerate the childish cacophony and hold his peace.

This he succeeded in doing – at least the first time that Haman’s name was mentioned. The children responded immediately with their *graggers* and their banging and hooting, and the man felt his temperature rising rapidly. But despite the thought of handing those children a well-deserved scolding, he was able to suppress the urge and remain silent.

That was the first time. The name of Haman, to be sure, is mentioned repeatedly throughout the Megillah. And with each successive mention, the attendant racket became harder and harder for the man to bear. His own outburst would cost him the mitzvah, however, thus forcing him to start again from the beginning. It was only this realization that held him in check.

But the Hamans continued – and so did the noise. Things were reaching the boiling point. Finally, with the next outbreak of banging and shouting, he could take it no longer. The dam burst, and out came a verbal thrashing of the pesky kids who had caused such aggravation.

With the harangue over, the realization dawned upon him that he had indeed lost out on the mitzvah and would have to go through the bother of finding another reader willing to start all over again for him. He also realized something else that was even more troubling. As it turned out, the “Haman” that had finally set him off was *the very last one in the Megillah*; no more would be read that evening. Had he only maintained control this last time, his ordeal would have been over (*R’ Yechiel Michel Stern, Middos V’hanhagos Tovos, pp. 552-553*).

More Than Just a Story

The above account becomes even more ironic when we consider the content and theme of the Megillah itself. What, indeed, is Megillas Esther all about? That may sound like an unusual question, for its storyline and characters are well-known: Mordechai and Esther, Haman and Achashveirosh, the plot against the Jews and the remarkable salvation. However, the underlying message of the Megillah, while straightforward enough, may be somewhat less known.

According to R' Yerucham Levovitz (*Da'as Chachmah U'mussar vol. I, § 26*), it is the notion of *middos* – character traits – that is the real “story” of the Megillah. Indeed, he states, it is somewhat uncharacteristic of a Book of the Scriptures to detail a narrative to the extent that this one does. The actual function of Megillas Esther is to serve as a primer of sorts, laying out the sharp contrast between the corrupted *middos* of the gentile world and the pristine ones of Yisrael – as embodied, in both cases, by the Megillah’s key figures.

Consider, for instance, the example of Esther, who achieved what must have been the most coveted dream of anyone else in the kingdom: being selected from everyone to become the queen of the realm. And yet we find no trace of conceit or basking in glory on her part. On the contrary, she comported herself with utmost chastity and reserve. While the other candidates availed themselves of elaborate cosmetics and ornamentation, regarding Esther the *passuk* states: וּבְהִגִּיעַ תִּרְאַסְתֶּר... לֹא בִקֶּשָׁה דָבָר – “And when Esther’s turn came... she did not ask for anything” (*Esther 2:15*). The subject, explains R' Yerucham, is not so much Esther the individual as it is the nation as a whole. Esther is the model for the quintessential daughter of Yisrael: virtuous and modest.

Haman, of course, serves as an example of the darker side of the *middos* spectrum. Haman had become one of the most prestigious personages in the land, a fact he was not shy to share with his peers. As it states: וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הַמֶּן אֶת־כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרַב בָּנָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הַמֶּן אֶת־כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרַב בָּנָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הַמֶּן אֶת־כְּבוֹד עֲשָׂרוֹ וְרַב בָּנָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר – “And Haman told them of the glory of his wealth and many sons, and all that the king had conferred greatness upon him and elevated him above the officers and servants of the king” (*ibid. 5:11*). Yet, instead of reveling in all of this blessing, it took just one individual to completely disrupt his equilibrium. The *passuk* describes Haman’s reaction when he noticed Mordechai’s refusal to bow: וַיִּמְלֵא הַמֶּן עַל־מֶרְדֵּכַי חֶמָּה – “And Haman was filled with rage against Mordechai” (*ibid. v. 9*). Regarding all of his success in light of this affront, Haman declared: וְכָל־זֶה אֵינְנִי שׂוֹה לִי בְכָל־עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֶנִּי רֹאֶה אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב – “And all of this has no value to me, as long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting by the king’s gate” (*ibid. v. 13*). This anger led him to exact his revenge on the entire Jewish people, attempting to wipe out every innocent man, woman, and child.

Thus, had the cranky congregant been more focused on the Megillah’s message than on the “pesky kids,” he may have salvaged his mitzvah and spared himself much heartache.

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