

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Ki Sisa - Purim



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Torah Wellsprings - Ki Sisa - Purim

Never Too Late to Do Teshuvah

The Chozeh of Lublin said that the primary aveirah of the egel was (33:4) ויתאבלו, that the nation became sad because of their sin and didn't believe they could do teshuvah and correct their aveirah.

The Divrei Chaim of Tzanz zt'l would call the egel an "*untergevorfene maaseh*," meaning they weren't guilty of this aveirah. They were set up to fail this test. Chazal (Avodah Zarah 4:) states, לא ישראל היו ראויים לאותו מעשה, which means that Bnei Yisrael wouldn't have committed this aveirah of the egel. It only happened to teach that we can do teshuvah. Rashi explains, "They were great people and had control over their yetzer hara. It shouldn't have occurred that their yetzer hara should rule over them. But the King decreed [that this time] their yetzer hara should rule over them, to give hope for baalei teshuvah. If a person commits aveiros and says, 'I will not do teshuvah because my teshuvah will not be accepted,' we tell him, 'Remember what happened by the egel. They had a kaparah, and their teshuvah was accepted.'"

The machatzis hashekel atoned for the Jewish nation, as it states (30:15) לכפר על נפשותיכם, "to atone for your souls."

Moshe Rabbeinu didn't understand what the shekel looked like until Hashem showed him one. Rashi (30:13) writes, "[Hashem] showed him a coin of fire that weighed a half-shekel, and said, 'This is what they should give.'"

Moshe knew the entire Torah, with all its laws and details. So why was the *machtzis hashekel* particularly difficult for Moshe to understand?

The answer is that the *machtzis hashekel* was for atonement, and it was hard for Moshe Rabbeinu to imagine that such a

small amount of money could bring atonement.

The Midrash Tanchumah (11) says, "When Moshe heard that the nation must give money for their atonement, he became afraid. [He feared that it would cost them a lot of money]. Hashem knew what Moshe was thinking, so Hashem told him, 'I promise, a *kikar* of silver isn't needed [for atonement], and not a hundred, fifty, or thirty silver coins either. All I ask is a half-shekel.'"

Another *Midrash* states that *Klal Yisrael* was afraid when they heard they must give money for their atonement. So they said, "All the money that we gathered in Mitzrayim and afterward from the Yam Suf was for nothing because we will need to give it all away for our atonement."

"Hashem knew what they were thinking.... He took a fiery half-shekel from under the *Kisei HaKovod* (Hashem's throne) and showed it to Moshe. 'This is what they should give.'"

So, when our deeds seem small and insignificant, be aware that for Hashem, even a half-shekel is a lot and can atone for great sins.

The first sefer that a sofer writes is generally megillas Esther. A bachur was learning to be a sofer, and he wrote a megillas Esther, but it didn't look too good. The letters were slanty and of different sizes; some of the words entered into the margin, and so on. No one wanted to buy it, not even for a low price, so his father bought it, hoping that this would encourage his son to continue practicing and trying. After he bought it, the father gave the megillah to a safrus merchant.

"What do you want me to do with this?" the merchant asked. He couldn't imagine that anyone would want to buy it.

"See what you can get for it," the father said. "Any price is better than nothing at all."

One day, a wealthy person asked the safrus merchant to bring several megillos to his home because he wanted to choose one. The rich person added, "Since I am troubling you to come to me, I will pay you \$2,500 for the megillah, even if the price is lower."

The merchant brought along every megillah he had in stock. The wealthy man turned down one after the other. "This isn't what I have in mind," he said simply, although the merchant didn't understand why he wasn't satisfied with his beautiful megillos. Finally, having turned down all the megillos, the merchant began packing up his megillos to leave. The wealthy man said, "One minute. I see you have one more megillah in your box that you didn't show me yet."

"No. It isn't for you," the merchant said. It was the beginner's megillah, and the merchant figured that if he didn't want all the beautiful megillos, he certainly wouldn't want this one. He was embarrassed to show it.

"Please show it to me," the wealthy man said.

The merchant opened the megillah, and the wealthy man loved it. "This is exactly what I wanted," he said, and he paid 2.5 thousand dollars. (This was several years ago when the prices weren't as high as they are currently).

Afterward, the merchant asked him why he preferred this megillah over all the others. The wealthy man replied, "The other megillos were written perfectly; all letters are uniform, the same height and style. They appear printed. But this megillah is different. It is evident that this megillah was hand-written by a sofer. Each letter is different. This is the type of megillah I like. I see in it the workmanship!"

The father repeated this story to me, and he said that we learn from this that it isn't hishtadlus that brings us parnassah, instead it is Hashem's brachah. This time, the hishtadlus wasn't as good, but Hashem placed his brachah, and he earned a lot of money.

I took another lesson from this episode. This story is a reminder that Hashem enjoys the work of human beings. It is our imperfection that makes our deeds special. Hashem has enough malachim. If Hashem wanted perfection, He wouldn't have created us. Hashem wants us, with our faults and human imperfections. Our deeds seem slanted and incomplete, and sometimes we step out of line, but it is precisely due to our human nature that Hashem desires our service.

Emunah

It states in the Megillah (Esther 4:7) ויגד לו ויגד לו ויגד לו, "Mordechai told him everything that happened to him." The Midrash (Esther Rabba 8:5) explains that Mordechai used the word קרהו, "happened to him", the same expression that is written of Amalek's attack, as it states (Devarim 25:18) אשר קרך, Amalek chanced upon Bnei Yisroel. This is an Amalek expression – that everything happens by chance and not through *hashgacha pratis*.

This week, the parashah discusses the *egel*, the sin of avodah zarah. After the first Churban Beis HaMikdash, the *chachamim* abolished the yetzer hara for avodah zarah, as the Gemara (Yoma 69.) tells us. But the sefarim say that remnants of avodah zarah remained. When a person's *Emunah* is not complete and strong, it falls under this category. When a person thinks the world runs naturally and forgets that Hashem, alone, runs everything, it is a remnant of the *yetzer hara* of *avodah zara*.¹

1. A Yid with a broken foot was brought to Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz zt'l. He was in great pain. The

Reb Refael Auerbach *zt'l*, brother of Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l*, met with an elderly Yid who had been by the Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* for shalosh seudos, and this is what he heard Rebbe Elimelech say:

In the generation before Moshiach comes, the *yirei Hashem* will be disrespected and on a low social standing, while the sinners will have power and be successful. This situation will be so distressing and such a disgrace for the religious Jews that if the students of the holy Baal Shem Tov would be living at this time, they wouldn't be able to tolerate it. Rebbe Elimelech compared the situation to a pot cooking on the fire. The unwanted flour rises to the top and is removed, and the

good food remains in the pot. This is what will occur at the end of days. The *resha'im* jump to the top; they take power and control, while those who fear Hashem are trampled on at the bottom. But those sinners will all be removed, and only the righteous people will remain. In the final generation before Moshiach comes, it will be like Hakadosh Baruch Hu spreads out a long rope from one side of the world to the other, and all Yidden will grab onto the rope. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will shake the rope forcefully, and the fools will take that to mean that Hashem wants them to leave Him. But the wise will say, "This is a test. We must hold on with all our strength." Whoever holds on tightly will be saved. This is called *חבלי משיח*, the ropes of Moshiach.²

Lechovitzer said, "Repeat after me," and he read to him the second brachah of *Shemoneh Esrei*, pausing after each phrase for the person to repeat after him: *אתה גבור לעולם ה'... מחיה מתים אתה... רב להשיע... ורופא חולים*. The man repeated after the Lechovitzer Rav, phrase after phrase. The Lechovitzer Rav asked him, "Do you believe everything we just said?"

The person confirmed that he did. The Lechovitzer Rav rebuked him, "Don't lie. We will repeat it," and they repeated the *brachah*. The man recited each verse after the Lechovitzer, concentrating intensely, trying to internalize each phrase. When they finished, the Lechovitzer asked again, "Do you believe?"

"I do," he almost shouted.

The Lechovitzer Rav rebuked him again.

They repeated the *brachah* a third time. This time, the sick person repeated each phrase with even greater hislahavus than before, and when they were finished, he shouted, "I believe! I believe!"

The Lechovitzer commanded him, "Get off the bed," and he got off.

Now that he believed that Hashem is the *רופא חולים*, he was healed.

The Lechovitzer told him that he wanted to conceal the miracle and that although he was healed, he should remain in bed for twenty-four hours, as if he was still ill, and only then leave the bed.

The man later said it was hard to remain in bed for twenty-four hours since he was completely healed (*Toras Avos, Maasei Avos, 55*).

The Divrei Shmuel of Slonim *zt'l* tells us how this miracle occurred:

"Someone who has true *emunah*, his *emunah* becomes like his hand – literally. Just as a person can perform his needs with his hands, so can he do things with his *emunah*. The Lechovitzer Rav performed miracles, and he helped people because he had a very high level of *emunah*, and he imbued his clear *emunah* into every Yid who came to him. With *emunah*, miracles beyond nature occur."

He says that this is implied in the words (*Shemos 17:12*), *ויהי ידיו אמונה עד בא השמש*, "His hands were with *emunah* until sunset." The connection between *emunah* and hands is that just as people can do things with their hands, so can one also achieve things through his *emunah*.

2. Rebbe Elimelech of Lizensk *zy"a* once discussed with his students about how everything is destined

Another slight form of avodah zarah that remains in our times is sadness.

The Maor VaShemesh (*Behaloscha*) writes, "A great foundation in *avodas Hashem* is to distance oneself from *עצבות ומרה שחורה*, from being sad, as far as one possibly can, because the *Zohar* says that *atzvus* is like *avodah zarah* (שמין עבודה זרה). The proof is that when one is sad, he has thoughts of *avodah zarah*. Therefore, one must be very distant from *atzvus*. It can lead to all *aveiros*."

The Tanya (*Igeres HaKodesh* ch.11) also teaches that sadness is like *avodah zarah*. He explains that this is because sadness means that one doesn't believe that everything is for the good. He writes, "When one is sad, this means he thinks his life isn't perfect and he lacks something he needs. But to think so is *kefirah*, heresy, *chas veshalom*. Therefore, the *chachamim* of *kabbalah* warn against *atzvus* immensely..."³

from Hashem, and nothing happens by chance. He told his students that even the location where an animal drops its waste is also planned from Heaven.

One of his students thought, "Why would it make a difference to Hashem where an animal drops its waste? This sounds outlandish."

The following day, this student walked near a high cliff and slipped on the ice. Fortunately, a lump in the ice stopped him from skidding off the cliff. He looked to see what had saved his life—frozen manure!

He returned to Rebbe Elimelech to tell him that he saw firsthand that the Rebbe's lesson was accurate. However, he didn't have to say anything because as soon as he entered, Rebbe Elimelech greeted him and said, "Nu? Now do you believe that even the place where animals drop their waste is also destined from Heaven?"

Once, two Yidden came to Rebbe Uri of Strelisk *zy"l*. They told him they were looking for a Rebbe and were considering joining his chassidus. Rebbe Uri said to them that he only accepts chassidim who believe in *hashgachah pratis*.

The chassidim replied that they believe in *hashgachah pratis*.

The Rebbe asked, "When a piece of straw falls off a wagon, do you believe this was destined from Heaven?"

The chassidim admitted they didn't have that level of *emunah* because why would Hashem care about such trivial matters.

A few days later, they returned and said that they now believed that even when some straw falls off a wagon, it was planned by Hashem.

"Why did you change your minds?" the Rebbe asked.

The chassidim explained, "We used to think that Hashem only cared about the major episodes of our lives; we thought that unimportant details of life happen by chance, and Hashem had no reason to be involved in them. But then we realized that for Hashem, what we consider major is also, in a way, insignificant. We told ourselves, "If we believe Hashem's *hashgachah* is over matters we consider major, we should also believe that Hashem's *hashgachah* is over everything, including things that seem trivial and insignificant to us."

3. It states (*Tehillim* 19:9), *פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב*. The word *פקודי* can mean lacking (see *Bamidbar* 31:49). Accordingly, this pasuk can be translated as follows: You should know that *פקודי*, whatever you lack, *ה'*, is from Hashem. *משמחי לב*, and you will be happy because since it is from Hashem, you can be sure it is for your benefit.

When the Rambam omits a halachah from his sefer, scholars study it in depth to understand why the Rambam left it out. No one suggests that the Rambam simply forgot that halachah when he wrote his sefer. A talmid chacham once said to a sad person, "If we are certain that the Rambam didn't omit anything by accident, and there is a reason and an intention why he left it out, certainly when Hashem left something out from your life, there is a reason for that, and it didn't happen by chance."

Yalkut Shimoni (Toldos 115) states, "Whoever changes his words [and tells a lie], it is like he worshipped avodah zarah."

Rebbe Simchah Bunim of Peshischa zy" a said that the severity of telling a lie is alluded to in the Torah from the words (*Shemos 23:7*) מדבר שקר תרחק, "Distance yourself from falsehood..." This is the only aveirah that the Torah emphasizes that we must distance ourselves from transgressing it.

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz zy" a (Imrei Pinchas 6:78) toiled his entire life to acquire the trait of *emes*. He would say, "We should consider telling an untruth to be as severe as arayos (adultery, etc.) When Klal Yisrael will be so cautious with saying the truth, Moshiach will come and redeem us."

The Shlah Hakadosh (Shaar HaOsiyos 4) writes, "Here, in Yerushalayim, may it speedily be rebuilt, there was a very great chassid from the Sephardic community who would come to me often. For all the money in the world, he would never say anything that wasn't one hundred percent true. He told me how his father trained him and his brother in this trait. When they were young and would come to their father complaining [about something the other one did], the father would say to them, 'Whoever tells the truth and admits when he did something wrong, I will forgive him, if he promises not to do it again. However, the one who says that he didn't do anything wrong, and later I discover that he lied, I will punish him severely.' And our father would do just that. For the child who admitted he did something wrong, our father would give him some coins to reward him for telling the truth. And he severely punished the one who lied. In this manner, he raised his children with the trait of *emes*. This is as it states: (Mishlei

23:23) אמת קנה, 'Purchase truth.' With money and presents, he trained his children to tell the truth until the truth became their second nature. Similarly, all wise people should devise strategies on how to raise their children with good middos and good deeds."

The Greatness of Small Deeds

It states (*Esther 4:17*) ויעבור מרדכי, and the Gemara says that this means Mordechai crossed over a body of water to go to the Yidden who lived on the other side of Shushan, to tell them to daven for Esther. Manos HaLevi (written by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz zt'l, author of Lecha Dodi) explains, "Even a minor deed, like crossing over water, is considered a great deed when done for a mitzvah. The water wasn't a large river; it was more like a puddle... Nevertheless, the Megillah tells us that Mordechai crossed the water as though it was a great accomplishment. This is because everything is accounted for." When a person performs a mitzvah, even the slightest deeds are worthy of being written in the megillah for all generations to read and see.

Chazal (*Gittin 57:*) state, "The grandsons of Haman taught Torah in Bnei Brak."⁴ Why did Haman HaRasha merit this?

Shem MiShmuel (*Purim 5680*) writes it is because Haman had one moment of emunah. The Midrash (*Esther 10:5*) states, "When Haman led Mordechai on the king's horse through the city's streets, what was Haman the *rasha* saying? (Tehillim 30:7-8) ואני אמרתי בשלוי בל אמוט, 'I said in my tranquility, 'I will never falter.' ... You hid Your countenance, and I became frightened." He had a moment of emunah, and for that, he was rewarded with descendants who taught Torah.

Someone complained to Rebbe Sholom of Kaminka about his bitter lot in life. Rebbe Shalom answered with an analogy: "Alcohol is bitter, but this bitter drink makes people happy... Similarly, although things seem bitter, it is really joyous. Something good will come from it."

4. One of the lessons of Haman's descendants was the renowned phrase (*Taanis 29.*) משוננס אדר מרבין בשמחה, when Adar arrives, we increase joy. This was taught by Rav Shmuel bar Shilas, a descendant of Haman.

Shem MiShmuel writes, "This is a lesson for every person: Even when he is at a low level, r'l, he shouldn't consider any good thought or good word that he says to be small. Let him grasp whatever good moments he can, and this will be a great benefit for him. The mouth cannot express how great these deeds are."⁵

The Gemara (Megillah 16.) states that when Haman came to Mordechai (to lead him through the streets of Shushan, as Mordechai rode on Achashveirosh's horse), he found Mordechai teaching the laws of *kemitzah* to his students. *Kemitzah* is to bring a handful of a meal-offering (made of just flour and oil) on the *mizbeiach*. Haman thought that small deeds are unimportant; only great deeds have value. This was demonstrated by the enormous gift of ten thousand kikar silver coins he offered Achashveirosh. In his eyes, only tremendous and impressive matters have value. Mordechai, on the other hand, taught his students that even a small handful (a *kometz*) of a *minchah* is a *korban* in Hashem's eyes. Every small deed is very precious in Hashem's eyes. In the end, Haman admitted that Mordechai was correct and said, "Your handful of flour pushed away my ten thousand *kikars* of silver."

One of the benefits of the "small deeds" is that one good deed leads to another, as Chazal say מצוה גוררת מצוה.

Chazal (Shabbos 105:) say, "This is the way of the yetzer hara: Today he tells you to do this [aveirah], tomorrow he tells you to do that [aveirah], until he tells you to worship avodah zarah - and he worships it!" The yetzer hara is happy with minor sins because

he cleverly knows that one deed leads to the next. We should learn from our enemy and consider every good deed significant. It is great in Hashem's eyes, and furthermore, one small deed will lead to another good deed, and gradually, we will grow in avodas Hashem.⁶

No Yeush!

When describing *Achashveirosh's* *seudah*, the *pasuk* states (Esther 1:8), לעשות כרצון איש ואיש, "to do according to the wish of man and man." Chazal (Megillah 12.) say איש ואיש, "man and man" refers to Mordechai and Haman. We can explain that Mordechai is called איש, which is *roshei teivos* for אין שום יאוש, "There is no reason to despair." Haman is called ואיש, with a vav at the beginning. These letters spell וא"ש. This demonstrates the difference between Mordechai and Haman. Mordechai signifies to us that there is always hope. As we wrote above, even if a person isn't perfect, his good deeds that he does make him precious to Hashem. Haman wants man to feel there is no hope for him due to his *aveiros*.

Shortly after the Yidden left Mitzrayim, they were confronted with a war against *Amalek*, and *Amalek* attacked those at a low spiritual level. As it states (Devarim 25:18), ויזנב בך, כל הנחשלים אחריו, "[Amalek] struck all...the weaklings in the rear." Rashi writes, "They were [spiritually] weak, and the clouds (ענני הכבוד) ejected them."

Amalek gravitates to the spiritually low people to convince them that there is no hope for them. The Yismach Yisrael (*Zachor* 3)

5. No one is worse than Haman, yet see how much he gained from one good thought! So, even when you learn just one chapter of mishnayos or one halachah, etc., these small deeds are extremely precious to Hashem, and the reward will be enormous - greater than we can imagine.

6. It states (Esther 3:2) ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה, "Mordecai would neither kneel nor bow down." It is written in the future tense. Sfas Emes zt'l says that alluded here is a lesson for every Yid. Even if in the past, there were times he kneeled and yielded to the yetzer hara, he should tell himself that he won't do it again.

Or, we can explain it this way: Even if he kneeled (יכרע), he wouldn't bow down (לא ישתחוה). He will stop the influence of the yetzer hara in its tracks and not allow himself to descend to lower levels.

writes, "Amalek caused them to think that they lost their חלק אליו, their G-dly soul..."

There is a mitzvah to erase the memory of Amalek and his descendants, but there is no mitzvah to obliterate Pharaoh's memory. This is because Amalek is worse than Pharaoh. Pharaoh didn't believe in Hashem. He said (*Shemos* 5:2), מִי ה' אֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁמַּע בְּקוֹלִי, "Who is Hashem that I must listen to Him?" Amalek is worse because he causes people to lose belief in themselves.

Revid HaZahav (*Haftarah Shabbos Shuvah*) explains that the Megillah hints at the disheartening words Amalek (the yetzer hara) tells people to cause them to lose hope. Amalek says (*Esther* 3:3), לֹמֵה אֶתְּהָ עֹוֹבֵר אֶת מִצְוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ, "Why do you disobey the King's

demand?" וַיְהִי בְּאִמְרָם אֵלָיו יוֹם יוֹם, and he repeats these words every day. Mordechai replies, אֲשֶׁר הוּא יְהוּדִי, you are a Yid. You perform mitzvos every day. It isn't as bleak as Amalek wants you to think.⁷

The Gemara (*Megillah* 12.) states, "The students asked Reb Shimon bar Yochai, 'Why were the Yidden of that generation deserving to die?'" The students knew that Haman's decree was also established in heaven. The Jewish nation of the time deserved annihilation, ר"ל, according to the heavenly court. The students wanted to know their aveirah, which made them guilty and deserving of such punishment.

Reb Shimon replied, "You tell me!"

7. The Jewish nation said (*Shemos* 17:7-8) וַיִּבֹּא עִמְלֵק וַיִּבְרָנוּ אִתּוֹ, "Is Hashem in our midst or not? and Amalek came." The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 26:2) explains, "[Hashem says] 'I am always among you, prepared to give you whatever you need, and you ask וַיִּבְרָנוּ אִתּוֹ, whether Hashem is with you? I swear that the 'dog' will come and bite you. You will shout to Me, and you will know where I am!' It can be compared to a child riding on his father's shoulders. When the child saw something he liked, he said, 'Father, pick that up for me' and the father does so and gives it to him. This happens a second and a third time. Along the way, they meet someone. The child asks that person, 'Did you see my father?' The father says angrily, 'You don't know where I am?!' He threw him down, and a dog came and bit the child." Only then did the son realize how much his father had been watching over him.

We learn from this that it is wrong to question וַיִּבְרָנוּ אִתּוֹ, whether Hashem is with us, chas ve'shalom. This brings on the impurity of Amalek. We also understand the opposite: When a person is firm in his emunah and awareness that Hashem is with us, taking care of our every need at every moment, and watches over us with love, that awareness weakens the strength of Amalek. This is the proper way to perform מחיית עמלק.

The Beis Avraham (*Chanukah*) says that when the Jewish nation said וַיִּבְרָנוּ אִתּוֹ, their question wasn't whether Hashem exists or not because they believed in Hashem. They knew that Hashem created and leads the world. Their question was וַיִּבְרָנוּ אִתּוֹ, is Hashem with us? Perhaps due to our aveiros, we don't merit that Hashem should be with us. ספק עמלק is gematriya, doubt, the doubt that perhaps they aren't good enough to have a connection with Hashem. But a Yid must believe that Hashem is always with him, at all times and situations.

יוסף לקח explains the joy of Purim, which is greater than the joy of the entire year, is because we are still in galus, אַחַת עֶבְרֵי אַחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ אֵנָּה, we are still slaves to Achashveirosh, and yet Hashem's hashgachah is over us to protect us.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (on *Shas*, *Megillah* 7:) explains that this is the reason for the mitzvah to drink on Purim. "Wine was created to console mourners, to ease their pain (*Sanhedrin* 70.). The wine on Purim helps us forget our worries of the galus, and we can throw our *pekel* on Hashem, Who will never abandon us."

Yaaras Dvash (vol.1 drush 3) writes, "The purpose of all miracles and wonders that Hashem does for us is to arouse us to study His Torah, to fear Him, and to serve Him, and to know that Hashem is always watching over us, and His love for us has never left us. This is the essence of the joy of Purim."

They replied, "It is because they enjoyed the seudah of that *rasha* (Achashveirosh)."

Reb Shimon said, "If so, the Jews in Shushan should die, and not the Yidden of the entire world."

The students said, "So, tell us the reason."

Reb Shimon said it is because they bowed down to Nevuchadnezzar's idol.

The Alshich and several other sources say it was a combination of both aveiros – eating at Achashveirosh's meal and bowing down to Nevuchadnezzar's idol.⁸

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (Toras Moshe, beginning of Megillas Esther) says that the marvelous wonder of the miracle of Purim was that Hashem prepared the salvation at this party.⁹ Vashti was killed, opening a space for Esther,

8. Why was eating at Achashveirosh's meal an aveirah? The king ordered them to attend, and to disobey would be *pikuach nefesh*, a danger to their lives!

The following mashal explains the aveirah:

A Yid and a goy were traveling together and stopped off along the highway to eat lunch.

"Do you want some wine?" the goy asked.

"No thanks. Jews aren't permitted to drink the wine of gentiles."

"How about a sausage? I have extra."

"No, thank you. We can't eat that either."

"It is delicious. You're sure you can't eat it?"

"I'm positive. We can only eat such foods when life is in danger."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, let's say someone is dangerously ill, and a doctor says he needs to eat these foods to recover."

"Then you would be allowed to eat it?"

"Definitely. Or let's say a goy takes out a knife and says, 'If you don't eat this food, I will kill you,' then we would also be allowed to eat it."

The goy whisked out his knife and said menacingly, "Eat my food, or I'll kill you."

The Yid was afraid and began eating. What could he do? It was *pikuach nefesh*.

"I'm sorry I did that to you," the goy said a few minutes later. "I was just joking."

The Yid put down the meat and pushed the wine to the side, and said, "I forgive you for playing that prank on me, but I don't forgive you for revealing to me, so soon, that it was a joke. Couldn't you wait until I finished the meal?"

This story explains the aveirah that the Jewish nation committed by participating in Achashveirosh's feast. The sin was that they *wanted* to be there. They were permitted to eat at this meal because their lives were in danger, but they should have attended with a heavy heart.

Chazal say that they were punished, *שנחנו מסעודתו של אחשוורוש*, because they *enjoyed* Achashveirosh's meal. The aveirah wasn't eating at the meal, but that they enjoyed it.

The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, Esther, ד"ה איתא במגילה) writes that they should have eaten a lot at home before going to the party, so the non-kosher food at the party would be considered *אכילה גסה* (eating when one is very full) because then the meal wouldn't be an aveirah.

9. He writes that the primary miracle isn't that Hashem heard their tefillos, because "Hashem also heard the tefillos of the non-Jewish city of Ninveh; why wouldn't Hashem listen to the shouts of Yisrael?" The

who saved the Jewish nation. So, at the place of sin, when Haman's decree was being established in heaven, the salvation of Bnei Yisrael was being arranged. This demonstrates Hashem's love to Bnei Yisrael, Who helps and saves them in every situation.¹⁰

The Jewish Nation Rises from the Lowest Levels

It states (Esther (6:13) ויאמרו לו חכמיו וזרש אשתו אם מזורע היהודים מרדכי אשר החלות לנפל לפניו לא תוכל לו כי זרע היהודים מרדכי אשר החלות לנפל לפניו, נפול תפול לפניו "His wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordechai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish seed, you will not prevail against him, but you will surely fall before him."

The pasuk uses the expression זרע היהודים, Jewish seed. The Tiferes Shlomo explains that seeds are placed in the ground. They were saying that the Jewish nation grows

from the lowest level. In fact, it is specifically from the lowest levels that their growth sprouts forth.

Rashi writes that Zeresh said, "This nation has been compared to the stars and the dust. When they descend, they descend to the dust; when they ascend, they ascend to the sky and the stars." The Tiferes Shlomo explains that from the dust, they rise to the highest levels.

This also applies to the individual. When a person falls to a low level, r'l, he can rise from there to extremely high levels. In retrospect, because of the fall, he rises even higher.

Esther requested from the chachamim that the story of Megillas Esther should be read in all generations (see Megillah 7., "קבעוני לדורות"). Certainly, Esther wasn't looking for honor or pride. So why did she ask for this, and what was her intention?

miracle of ונהפוך הוא (that Achashveirosh changed his mind and spared the Jewish nation) wasn't beyond nature because it is natural for a king to love the queen. Especially, since Achashveirosh was הפנפך, he had a nature to change his mind quickly (see Megillah 15:). So, it isn't so surprising that one day he loved Haman and the next day he sent him to the gallows.

Rather, the primary miracle was that he killed Vashti. For 187 days, he partied, and he didn't lose his mind. On the final day of the celebration, he became insane. Also, Vashti went insane and replied brazenly to the king. Especially since, at that time, the decree of their annihilation was set in Heaven because they were participating in Achashveirosh's party. Nevertheless, Hakadosh Baruch Hu had *rachmanus* on the Yidden, and prepared the cure during this meal and killed Vashti. This enabled Esther to become the queen and save her brethren from Haman's decree. So, the beginning of the salvation was when the Jewish nation was at the lowest levels, and they were involved in sin, r'l. This teaches us that בנים משחיתים, even when they sin, they are called בנים, Hashem's beloved children.

10. Be'er Moshe of Koznitz ז"ל (ד"ר לפ זכור) writes, "Remember what Amalek, the *yetzer hara*, did to you... He showed you the grave *aveiros* you committed before Hashem and your faults that reached the heavens... But the truth is, everything he says is untrue. Hashem is a *rachum v'chanun*, and He desires the *teshuvah* of *resha'im*... Even if most of his life he did bad deeds, when he does *teshuvah* and regrets his bad deeds at the end of his life, he will also merit Olam HaBa. About him, it states (*Avodah Zarah* 10:) 'Some acquire Olam HaBa in a single moment.'"

One pasuk states (Shemos 17:14) מוחה אמוחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים "I will surely obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens." It seems that Hashem will destroy Amalek. A second pasuk states (Devarim 25:19) תמוחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים לא תשכח "You shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget!" This pasuk implies that the Jewish nation must destroy Amalek.

The Beis Avraham (ד"ה זכור) answers, "We begin the destruction of Amalek [with our teshuvah] even if it is just a drop, and immediately Hashem will help from above and destroy Amalek." Hashem is helping us with our teshuvah, so there is no reason to worry. We will succeed.

Rebbe Shalom of Shatz zy" a answers: Esther was an orphan; she had a low social status. According to the general rules of nature, nothing special would ever come from her. But Esther became the queen of Madai and Paras, and saved the Jewish nation. She, therefore, requested that her story not be forgotten so that every Jew can know that there is always hope for them, no matter which social status they start at and no matter what spiritual level they fall to.¹¹

The Midrash (Esther Rabba 6:7) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to Yisrael, 'You cried and said (Eichah 5:3) יתומים היינו ואין אב, 'We have become orphans and fatherless.' I swear that the redeemer I will prepare for you in Madai won't have a father or a mother."

The Maharal (Or Chodesh) explains, "To battle with Amalek, you must reach the highest level, and only an orphan and those at low levels can reach such high levels. As it states (Yeshayah 57:15) מרום וקדוש אשכון את דכא ושפל רוח, '[Hashem says, I am] exalted and holy, yet I dwell with the crushed and humble in spirit.' Hashem is with those who are low, and He raises them high. Therefore, Esther, an orphan from her father and mother, achieved social greatness above Haman. When Bnei Yisrael said they were orphans, Hakadosh Baruch replied that He doesn't abandon those at low levels. 'I swear, your redeemer in Madai will be an orphan because Hashem raises them high so that they can overcome Haman.'"

Therefore, those who are downtrodden shouldn't lose hope because Hashem raises specifically such people to the highest levels.¹²

Care for Fellow Man Brought the Purim Miracle

It states in Megillas Esther that when the Yidden heard Haman's evil decree, there was (4:3) צום ובכי ומספד, fasting, crying, and eulogies. The Alshich points out that a hesped, eulogy, is said on others. No one says a hesped on himself. He explains that each person was crying for his fellow man. They weren't only worried for themselves but also about their friends' fate. They cried, "If Haman succeeds with his evil decree, what will be with our neighbors and friends?" This compassion brought salvation.

It states (Tehillim 121:5) ה' צלך, "Hashem is your shadow." The Midrash teaches that just as a shadow mimics what a person does, ה' צלך means Hashem mimics what people do. The Alshich HaKadosh (quoted in *Arvei Nachal, Mikeitz, Drush 1*, ר"ה ואמנם) teaches that Mordechai and Esther cared for one another, and they helped one another. This aroused Hashem to act accordingly, to care and have compassion for the Jewish nation.

The Alshich writes, "Mordechai didn't think about what he could gain, rather what Esther could gain. When he heard Bigson and Seresh plotting to kill Achashverosh, he knew that whoever saved the king would receive a grand reward. So, Mordechai told Esther about the plot. [He wanted her to be rewarded.] But Esther wanted Mordechai to get the credit, so she told Achashverosh in the name of Mordechai. It states (Esther 2:22) ויודע הדבר למרדכי ויגד לאסתר המכלה ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי, 'The matter became known to Mordechai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told to the king in Mordechai's name.' They were both trying to help each other, and in the merit of their selfless caring

11. Sifsei Chachamim (Introduction to masechta Megillah #25) writes, "Chazal (Yoma 29.) say אסתר סוף כל הניסים, 'Esther is the end of the miracles.' This means that when a person feels that miracles can't happen to him, he should remember what happened to Esther, and that will remind him that miracles do indeed occur."

12. Esther was beautiful as it states (Esther 2:7) יפת תואר ומובת מראה. The Rokeach (quoted in Tosfos HaShalem on Megillah) says that the roshei teivos of these words spell יתום, orphan. Because she was an orphan, Hashem granted her beauty because Hashem gives unique gifts to the brokenhearted and downtrodden.

for one another, Hashem saved them and the entire Jewish nation".¹³

It states in the megillah (2:11), ובכל יום ויום, מרדכי מתהלך לפני חצר בית הנשים לדעת את שלום אסתר, "Day after day, Mordechai would walk in front of the courtyard of the house of women to know about Esther's well-being and what would become of her." The Sfas Emes (7637) writes, "Everything written in the megillah is part of the miracle. For four or five years, when Esther was taken by the goyim, Mordechai HaTzaddik would go every day to see how she was doing, for she was an orphan, captured among the goyim. This is certainly part of the miracle. We merited the miracle thanks to Mordechai's concern for Esther." This is as we are explaining. When one shows concern for his fellow man, Hashem acts similarly towards the Jewish nation. This attitude brought the salvation.

Haman said (*Esther* 3:8), ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורד, "There is a nation scattered about and dispersed..." Tzaddikim said that Haman's primary strategy to harm the Yidden was to cause separation among them. In response, Esther told Mordechai (4:16), לך כנוס את כל היהודים, "Go gather all the Yidden." The unity of Bnei Yisrael and their caring for one another saved them.¹⁴

The Kedushas Levi (beginning of *Kedushah Rishonah*) writes, "Purim has three mitzvos which aren't found by any other yom tov: (1) reading the megillah, (2) *matanos l'evyonim*, and (3) *mishloach manos*. The fourth mitzvah - to celebrate with a festive meal is performed every *yom tov*." The commentaries explain that the purpose of *matanos l'evyonim* and *mishloach manos* is to increase peace and love among Yidden. We have these mitzvos on Purim because it was love and peace that brought about salvation.¹⁵

13. Someone was delivering a *drashah* to a group of teenagers. An *askan* approached the podium and gave the speaker a piece of paper.

The speaker stopped to read the note and announced, "A generous individual has chosen to hand out money to everyone present tonight. He instructed that the money be distributed as follows: Everyone must choose a partner and arm-wrestle with him. Keep track of who wins each round because, for each win, you will get one dollar." The competition began immediately.

Fifteen minutes later, the speaker approached each team to get their score. With one team, one boy won three rounds, and his partner four. The speaker gave them three and four dollars, respectively.

The next pair told him their score was 5 to 4, so he gave one five dollars and the other four.

Then he reached a pair who told him, "I won 1,500 times, and my partner won 1,500 times."

He gave them each \$1,500.

The speaker turned to the others and said, "You were all trying to beat your opponents, and because of that, most of the time and energy was wasted fighting your partner. But this team worked together. They let each other easily push their arms to the table, and in this manner, each won 1,500 rounds."

The lesson is that you earn the most by helping your fellow man.

14. There is another approach from tzaddikim that the Jewish nation was saved because they were careful with their speech. The Gemara (*Megillah* 13:) says, "No one knew how to speak *lashon hara* like Haman." This is contrasted by Esther, about whom it is written, אין אסתר מגדת, "Esther wouldn't tell..."

15. When we give *mishloach manos*, we give two items. When we give *matanos l'evyonim*, one gift for each poor person is sufficient.

The Pnei Menachem *zt'l* explains that, naturally, people have compassion for the needy. Therefore, the trait of sympathy for the poor doesn't need to be developed as much, and it is enough to give one gift to a needy person. That is sufficient to remind us of our obligation to care and be concerned about others in

The megillah states (9:22), משלוח מנות איש לרעהו, to send gifts of food to one's friend. According to the Sfas Emes (Megillah 7: ד"ה בגמרא, (רבה שדר), one doesn't fulfill the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* by sending *mishloach manos* to his Rav or *Rosh yeshiva* because the mitzvah is to give איש לרעהו, to a friend, to an equal, and it isn't proper to call one's *Rebbe*, "my friend." However, the Sfas Emes accedes that if a *Rosh yeshiva* gives somebody *mishloach manos*, this means the *Rosh yeshiva* considers him an equal. So now he can reciprocate and send back *mishloach manos*.

On Purim, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives *mishloach manos* to the Jewish nation. Hashem's *mishloach manos* is bounties of goodness. After Hakadosh Baruch Hu considers us רעהו, His friends, we can reciprocate and send Him *mishloach manos*. Our *mishloach manos* to Hashem are the mitzvos of Purim.¹⁶

In Shemonah Esrei, we say ונאמן אתה להחיות מתים, "You are trusted that you will resurrect the dead." The roshei teivos are the same roshei teivos for ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו, the mitzvah to give *mishloach manos*. The last

letters spell מתנה, gift. This hints that in the merit of *mishloach manos*, Hashem will grant us great gifts, even as wondrous as *techiyas hameisim*, the resurrection of the dead.

A Gantz Yur Purim – Purim All Year Long

The Shem Mishmuel said there is no kiddush on Purim, so we shouldn't make Havdalah either. This means we should keep the teshuvah and inspiration we attain on Purim for the entire year.

On Purim, a drunk bachur told Reb Mottel Slonimer zt'l that he wanted to do teshuvah. Reb Motel said, "Come back to speak with me about it tomorrow."

It is easy to say on Purim that you want to improve your ways, but the trick is to do so tomorrow.

This is hinted at in Esther's words (5:8) מחר אעשה כדבר המלך, "Tomorrow I will do as the king says." This is the primary test to see whether your inspiration will be there tomorrow as well.¹⁷

need. However, people generally don't like giving gifts to someone who doesn't lack money. They feel that it's costing them money for no purpose. Therefore, to train ourselves to genuinely care for our fellow man, we give two gifts per person.

16. The custom of *mishloach manos* is to give the food *together* with the dish. (One doesn't ask for the dish back after delivering the food.) This hints that on Purim, Hashem gives us His *mishloach manos* of bounty together with a dish, meaning that even if one isn't a vessel worthy of receiving Hashem's bounty, Hashem provides the vessel, too, to enable him to receive the bounty.

17. A poor person went to a wealthy person Friday night and said, "I need money. I have so many debts. Can you please give me ten thousand dollars?"

The wealthy man replied, "Perhaps. But now it's Shabbos. Let's discuss it after Shabbos."

On Shabbos morning, the poor man approached the wealthy man again and said, "In addition to the ten thousand, can you please lend me one hundred thousand dollars so I can get back on my feet?"

"That, too, is possible. We'll discuss it after Shabbos."

The poor man was overjoyed with his new connection. "He must like me," he thought. "He wants to help me." So, *shalashudes* time, he went to the wealthy person again and suggested, "Perhaps you can make me a partner in your business."

"It could be," the wealthy man replied. "I'm not against it. But now it's Shabbos. Come to me after Shabbos, and we will discuss it."

It says in Megillas Esther (9:27) ולא יעבור, and Rebbe Henech of Alexander zt'l explains that this means that Purim should never pass, never leave us. What we acquire should remain with us forever.

In *Shoshanas Yaakov* we say that the salvation came from trusting in Hashem, as we say, להודיע שכל קויד לא יבושו ולא יכלמו לנצח כל, החוסים בך "To reveal that all those who trust in You will never be embarrassed..."

The Sfas Emes says that כל in this phrase – שכל קויד... כל החוסים – means that no matter what level you are on, when you trust in Hashem, Hashem will save you. Similarly, it states (*Tehillim* 31:25), חזקו ויאמץ לבבכם כל המיחלים לה', "Be strong and feel encouraged, everyone who trusts in Hashem." *Bitachon* is available for everyone. Whatever level you are at, you can trust that Hashem will help you.

The *Shoshanas Yaakov* also emphasizes לה' יבושו ולא יכלמו, that we trust in Hashem, and we won't be embarrassed. Similarly, it states (*Tehillim* 71:1), בך ה' חסיתי אל אבושה לעולם, "I trust in You Hashem, I shall never be embarrassed."

Ben Ish Chai zt'l explains that some people are embarrassed to tell others about their *bitachon* because they fear that if what they are hoping for doesn't occur, they will be made fun of. But our trust in Hashem should be with so much certainty that Hashem will help that we won't be embarrassed to proclaim it to others.

To explain his lesson, he tells a story that happened with Reb Moshe Galanti zt'l, who

was the Rav of Yerushalayim about three hundred years ago. (The story is written in מסע ירושלים and (עוד יוסף חי, בשלה):

The people of Yerushalayim were worried because the winter season was almost over, and it hadn't rained that year. The skies were clear and blue, not a cloud in sight.

Rain is crucial in Yerushalayim for crops and even for drinking. Yerushalayim isn't near a river or sea, and the few wells dry up quickly when there isn't rain. People were walking around sad and fearing the worst.

The Yidden, and *l'havdil*, also the Arabs and the Christians, raised their hands in prayer and fasted. Many Yidden went to *kever Rachel* (in nearby Beis Lechem) and the *kever* of Dovid HaMelech. *L'havdil*, the goyim went to the places they consider holy to them, but the heavens remained sealed.

The *pasha* sent a message to Rav Moshe Galanti, the elderly Rav of Yerushalayim: "We are certain that the drought is due to the sins of the Jewish community. We are considering banishing all of you from Yerushalayim. You have until Tuesday to bring rain. We will enact the *geirush* (expulsion) if you fail. You consider yourselves the Chosen Nation and say Hashem is your Father. Prove that to us now, during this time of need. Show us that Hashem listens to your prayers. Otherwise, (he swore in the name of his prophet), I will do as I say."

Rav Moshe Galanti decreed a fast for three days (Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday). Men,

The poor man was so happy. Finally, he could see the end of the dark tunnel of his tzaros.

After Shabbos, he looked for the wealthy man but couldn't find him. When he finally located him, the poor man said, "Nu. What is your decision?"

"About what?" the wealthy man asked.

"What we discussed! Ten thousand dollars for tzedakah, a hundred-thousand-dollar loan, and the partnership."

"That we discussed on Shabbos," the wealthy man said, "but now it isn't Shabbos anymore."

Similarly, people make great, lofty plans on Purim, resolutions for the future, but the trick is to keep them after Purim passes.

women, and children were in the beis medresh, crying and praying nonstop for salvation. Tuesday arrived, the last day they had to bring about the salvation of rain, and the skies were clear. Tuesday afternoon, as the sun began its descent,¹⁸ Rav Moshe Galanti told the community, "Dress in rain gear and come with me to the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik. We will daven there for rain. But make sure you bring boots and blankets to protect yourselves from the rain because it will pour when we return home."

Everyone was shocked when they heard Rav Moshe Galanti's prophecy because the skies were totally clear. There wasn't a cloud in the sky larger than the size of a person's palm. Nevertheless, they followed their Rav's advice: They took along their rain gear and went with their Rav to Shimon HaTzaddik's grave.

Since they lived in the old city of Yerushalayim, they passed through the gate of Yerushalayim called Bub El Amud en route to Shimon HaTzaddik's grave. The Arab guard at the gate couldn't contain his laughter. He found the scene to be hilarious. The people dressed as though it was pouring when the sun was shining brightly. They told him about the Rav's prophecy, which made him angry since he thought the Rav was misleading his community. When Reb Moshe Galanti passed by, this Arab guard slapped Rav Moshe Galanti on the face. Rav Moshe looked at him in silence and didn't respond.

They came to Shimon HaTzaddik's *kever*. They raised their voices; they prayed and cried. Rav Moshe Galanti whispered silently into the grave.

Suddenly, the winds blew forcefully. The olive trees on Har HaZeisim shook in the wind. The pure blue sky became covered with clouds, and heavy rain fell. Rav Moshe Galanti continued whispering into the grave, and the rain became stronger and stronger until the ground was flooded. The community watched the miracle that was occurring before their eyes. They protected themselves from the rain with the blankets and gear they had brought.

The Arab guard of Bub El Amud gate came running to Shimon HaTzaddik's *kever*. He apologized to Rav Moshe Galanti for embarrassing him and for hitting him. Then, the guard lifted Rav Moshe Galanti in his arms and carried him all the way home.

The city of Yerushalayim celebrated with music for three days and three nights. The Arabs and the Christians admitted that the rain came due to the *tefillos* of the Jewish community. Embarrassed, they acknowledged that Hashem prefers the Yidden's *tefillos* more than theirs.

Wednesday, the day after the miracle occurred, the Arab guard came to Rav Moshe Galanti and requested that he convert him. He said that he wanted to be his servant forever.

As we contemplate this story, we understand that if it hadn't rained, Rav Moshe Galanti would be embarrassed, as he told everyone to bring along their rain gear and nothing happened.

The Ben Ish Chai explains that there are two types of *bitachon*. There is *bitachon* that's alive in one's heart, but he doesn't show it to others because he isn't confident that it will be as he thinks. Then, there's a level of *bitachon* when one is so confident that

18. When the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* lived in Hungary, he would go every year to the *kever* of Reb Isaac of Kaliv *zt'l* on his *yahrtzeit*, the 7th of Adar. He would always come towards evening when the day was almost over. Once, he arrived in Kaliv in the morning, but he didn't go to the *kever* until it was close to nighttime. People asked him, "You are here anyway; why not go to the *kever* earlier?"

He replied, "In a marketplace, the best deals are made when the market is about to close."

Hashem will help. He is ready to act on it.¹⁹ In this story, Rav Moshe Galanti didn't only trust Hashem in his mind and heart. He acted upon it by instructing the Jewish community to dress for the rain. Therefore,

we pray, לעולם לא נבוש כי כך בטחנו, our *bitachon* shouldn't result in shame. People should not point at us mockingly and say, "You trusted in Hashem, and see what happened to you!"²⁰

19. There's a story about two chassidim who received a *brachah* from their Rebbe for children. For one chassid, the *brachah* worked immediately. Within a year, he had a child. The other one didn't have a child. The childless chassid complained to the Rebbe, "Why did your *brachah* help him and not me?"

The Rebbe replied, "When I blessed him with children, he bought a crib." In other words, he was confident that the *brachah* would work. His *emunah* and *bitachon* helped the *brachah* work. "But you didn't buy a crib..."

20. On the topic of shame, we tell here a couple of stories which express how careful we must be not to shame or humiliate our fellow man:

The Tchebiner Rav's *zt'l* second wife once set a table for her husband for dinner, but the Tchebiner Rav noticed that the silverware wasn't spotless. The Tchebiner Rav was an *istinis* (particularly sensitive by nature), and he couldn't eat from cutlery that wasn't perfectly clean. However, he didn't want to embarrass his wife, so he put the silverware in his sleeve, went to the sink, and washed them there. To his wife, it looked like he had gone to wash his hands, and in this way, he saved her from shame.

When the Maharil Diskin *zt'l* was elderly, his doctor instructed him to eat a lot of sugar because he needed more sugar in his blood.

His *shamash* once prepared a tea for him and accidentally added a heaping spoonful of salt instead of sugar.

The Maharil Diskin drank that tea and showed no signs that something was wrong so as not to embarrass the *shamash*.

When the Maharil Diskin's Rebbetzin discovered what happened, she exclaimed, "It isn't healthy to have so much salt!" (She added that since he drank the salt with hot tea, the salt would be well absorbed in his body, and she was concerned for his health.)

The Maharil Diskin replied, "Chazal already addressed such a situation. They said (*Brachos* 43:) נוה לו לאדם שיטיל עצמו לכבשן האש ואל ילבין פני חברו ברבים, "It is better for a person to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to embarrass his fellow man in public." The Maharil Diskin preferred to drink the tea rather than cause shame and humiliation to another person.