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Returning the Rebellious Son

Mordechai and Esther established the mitzvos of Purim: "לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יְמֵי מְשֻׁתָּהּ וְשִׂמְחָהּ וּמְשָׁלַח מְנוּחַת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְּנוּגוֹת לְאֲבִינִים", "To make them days of feasting and joy, and sending portions to one another, and gifts to the poor." It raises a question: What benefit was there in these takanos, considering that the Jews were still mixed among the gentiles? After all, we do not find that Mordechai separated them from the nations; it was only Ezra the Scribe who eventually achieved this. Moreover, why did miracles occur for them at that time, given that, despite their three-day fast, they were still considered as "immersing while holding impurity in hand"?



A Mashal – The Wise King

This can be explained through a mashal about a king whose son had learned from lowly people to behave brazenly and harm the kingdom. Initially, the king disciplined his son and forcibly brought him back to his palace, frightening him so much that the son remained secluded in his room, yet he secretly longed to return to his bad friends—the enemies

of the king—and felt forced to stay in the palace.

One day, the king went hunting in the forest, and his son seized the opportunity to reconnect with his harmful friends. Upon the king's return, seeing his son wandering among street vagrants, the king understood that discipline alone would only harden his son's rebellious heart, prompting him to seek further opportunities to rebel.

Thus, the wise king decided not to punish his son but instead showered him with luxurious quarters in his palace, servants from his own people to worry for him and feed him, providing all good things abundantly. Slowly, the son realized that his street companions merely appeared friendly outwardly, using him solely for money and benefits. Once satisfied, they would abandon him. Recognizing this, he distanced himself from them and loved being close to his father, the king.

The Nimshal – Mordechai Corrects the Main Problem

At the giving of the Torah,

MY STORY!

The Child Who Was Saved and Saved His Savior

To the editors of the wonderful publication "Sweetness of Shabbos":

I am sending you a remarkable story from the Holocaust era involving my grandfather, who passed away three years ago (5782/2022) after a long and fulfilling life. My grandfather deeply enjoyed your weekly publications, and we, his grandchildren, wish to publish his inspiring story here, to be an iluy neshama for his soul. We believe Purim is the appropriate time to share this account, as it commemorates how the Yidden were rescued from their enemies.

Here is the story exactly as my grandfather would tell it:

"When I was ten years old, World War II broke out, and I was separated from my parents, my four brothers, and two sisters.

Before I was taken from my father, he told me: 'Naftali, remember Hashem—He can save you anywhere and in every situation. Always remember the pasuk: "בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֵלֶיךָ בָּגִיאַת בְּלִמְחֹת לֹא אִירָא רָע כִּי אֲתָהּ", "עַמּוּדִי", "Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for You are with me".

A few minutes later, they snatched me from my father's hands, and immediately I began to daven desperately to Hashem, crying out that I wanted to live.

They loaded me, along with many other Yidden, onto a cattle car. I was the only child there, and it was extremely crowded. I davened to Hashem that I wouldn't get crushed, and suddenly, the person next to me stretched out his leg, and another person stretched out his arm, creating a small space around me. I thanked Hashem and

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Hashem forced Am Yisrael to accept it out of fear, symbolized by holding the mountain over their heads (Shabbat 88a). Initially, this caused the Jews to fulfill the Torah out of fear, which led them to perceive the Torah as burdensome. Consequently, they sought opportunities to abandon it. The Nevi'im rebuked Am Yisrael for viewing Torah observance as toil and hardship, rather than with love, as it says, "ולא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתִּי קָרְאתָ יַעֲקֹב כִּי יִגְעַתָּ בִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל", "*Yet you have not called upon Me, Yaakov, for you have grown weary of Me, Yisrael*" (Yeshaya 43:22). Hashem desires service that comes from love, not weary duty.

In the days of Achashverosh, the Yidden succumbed to enjoying his feast. Mordechai foresaw that this would lead them to assimilation and intermarriage among the gentiles and forbade attending Achashverosh's feast. Mordechai thereby reinforced takanos concerning gentile bread, wine, and oil, originally enacted by Daniel, yet previously unaccepted. The pasuk says, "אַל תִּשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל", "*Do not rejoice, Yisrael, like the joy of the nations*," warning against joining gentile celebrations to prevent assimilation.

Indeed, after participating in Achashverosh's feast, many Jews assimilated among the gentiles, adopting their corrupt ways. This gave Haman grounds to accuse them: "יָשְׁנוּ עִם", "*There is one nation*"—asleep from mitzvos, "מִפְּזָר וּמִפְּרֵד בֵּין הָעַמִּים", "*scattered and dispersed among the nations*,"—since the assimilated among the goyim, thus easily destroyable without heavenly anger. Therefore, Mordechai fought Haman publicly, as Yiddishkeit itself was endangered.

After the decree was made, the pasuk says: "וְהָעִיר שֹׁשַׁן נְבוֹכָה", "*The city of Shushan was bewildered*," explaining that, due to their assimilation, children were confused about whether they were Jews or gentiles. Mordechai and Esther corrected the sin of enjoying Achashverosh's feast through their three-day fast. However, the primary sin—assimilation among gentiles—was unresolved during Mordechai's time and was only corrected later by Ezra, who wept with them and finally separated them from gentiles.

Days of Feasting and Joy for Sinners?

Despite still being servants of Achashverosh, Mordechai did not decree separation from

gentiles but instituted days of feasting and joy. Yet, what joy was appropriate while assimilated among gentiles? The real reason for assimilation was the lack of love and unity among Jews. When a Jew sees internal strife and harmful speech of lashon hara, this causes him weakness that makes him abandon faith. Others assimilate due to poverty and lack of sustenance, therefore, Mordechai established giving gifts to the poor.

Chazal teach that during Achashverosh's reign, the Jews re-accepted the Torah out of love. Although they were damaged by attending Achashverosh's feast and remaining assimilated, yet Mordechai taught them to lovingly embrace the Torah way and was metaken mitzvos that will automatically separate them from the goyim and bring unity withing the Yidden. Had he chosen fear, as at Har Sinai, he would have to imposed severe penalties for anybody who mixes in with the gentiles—as head of the Sanhedrin—but instead he chose to teach the Yidden and establish mitzvos that promote unity and love.

This we learn from the pasuk, "קִיְּמוּ וְקִבְלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים", "*The Jews established and accepted upon themselves and their descendants*," indicating their new acceptance with tremendous love, despite the assimilation they were still in. And Hashem showed them back His love and performed great miracles to save them.

Love Removes a Person from Evil

Instead of separating them from the goyim, Mordechai taught them first good qualities and behavior. "מְשַׁלַּח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְּנוֹת", "*Sending portions to one another, and gifts to the poor*", which will bring them to love, unity and peace. Also a seudas Purim that brings a person closer to Hashem with gratitude for His miracles and kindness. All this Mordechai made as preparation for the to make teshuvah, when finally Ezra HaSofer came, Am Yisrael was ready to abandon the bad ways, leave their gentile wives and come back. Ezra Hasofer, too, worked this midda of love and kindness, as the pasuk says: "וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לָכוּ אֲכָלוּ מִשְׂמֵנִים וּשְׂתוּ מִמֵּתֻקִּים וְשַׁלְּחוּ מְנוֹת לְאִין נֶכּוֹן לוֹ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאֲדֹנֵינוּ וְאַל תִּעַצְבוּ כִּי חֲדוֹת ה' הִיא מְעֻזְכֶם", "*And he said to them, 'Go, eat fat foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord, and do not be sad, for the joy of Hashem is*

your strength" (Nechemya 8:10).

Often this is also the way Hashem brings a person back —showering kindness on him to inspire repentance. Similarly, if one identifies negative traits within himself, he must first nurture love between him and others, refraining from speaking bad of any fellow Jew. Then, he will naturally distance himself from evil.

Similarly, in educating children, providing an opportunity to accept Torah out of love is essential. When love guides education, children will naturally distance themselves from wrongdoing.

Megillat Esther's Eternal Relevance

This clarifies why Hashem arranged for Esther, the most modest woman, to be taken to Achashverosh's palace. Hashem wanted to awaken the Jews to recognize their sin of assimilation, and once this shook them it was like their punishment and atonement for them, and in the end—this was what brought their salvation.

This explains why all the Megillos will become invalid except for Megillas Esther which will

remain relevant also l'asid lovo, as it highlights that Jews will again find redemption through recognizing Hashem's mercy despite being deeply influenced by gentile cultures. As it says that Am Yisrael will be redeemed either when being a generation that's totally in fault or a generation that totally in favor.

This strengthens us that even now that we are so influenced by the goyim, we still believe firmly in Hashem's eventual complete redemption.

Indeed, this year, we have witnessed great miracles with the defeat of those plotting against Jews, and we trust that Hashem will continue showing us abundant miracles through mercy. This approach of kindness and love will inspire our genuine repentance. Thus, Megillat Esther remains fitting even in the future, since it represents that a whole generation can miraculously shift from sinfulness to righteousness instantaneously. In the time of Moshiach, even if the whole generation will be at fault, the situation can turn around at once to become a generation that's completely in favor—once everybody has in mind good thoughts of repentance and teshuvah. May it be in our time.

The Sweetness of Mishloach Manos

Mordechai arrives with his students at the homes of the Yidden of Shushan who had assimilated among the nations and intermarried, bringing mishloach manos to them and their children.

Menashe receives the mishloach manos and becomes deeply ashamed. Gershom, who had earlier received mishloach manos, is awakened to repentance and runs away from his home. His gentile father-in-law becomes angry and wants to hit him and Mordechai.

**More about this in the ma'amar:
"Returning the Rebellious Son".**



>>>Sweet Advice

At the conclusion of Megillat Esther we say: "גַּם חַרְבוֹנָה זְכוּר לְטוֹב", "*And Charvonah, too, is remembered favorably,*" because through him Haman was hanged on the gallows. And this is despite the fact that Charvonah had initially plotted together with Haman to build a tall gallows on which to hang Mordechai. From here we learn that even if a person stumbles and has evil ways, if ultimately he abandons his wicked path and chooses good, he merits being remembered favorably, just like Charvonah.

>>>Sweet Tefillah

Ribono shel Olam! In the merit of the days of Purim, about which it is said, "*Whoever stretches out his hand is given,*" please accept our davening as we raise our hands

to You and beg for Your mercy. Grant us wisdom and understanding, truthfulness, and complete sincerity to serve You wholeheartedly and with our entire being, always choosing the path of good, and engaging in Torah purely for Your sake. May our learning reveal Your abundant kindness and goodness towards us, leading us to love You and to embody good and upright qualities.

Just as You wiped out the wicked Haman, the enemy of the Jews, and elevated Mordechai the righteous along with the entire Jewish people, may You soon allow us to witness the downfall of all enemies of Am Yisrael and the rising honor of Your nation. May we merit, even this year, to eat from the Pesachim and from the zevachim offerings that we will bring speedily in Your rebuilt Beis HaMikdash.

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continued davening for further assistance.

After a long journey, we were taken off the train for selection. Those suitable for work were directed to the right, towards life, while the elderly and children were sent to the left, towards death. I understood clearly that naturally, I should be sent to the left side. I cried bitterly to Hashem, begging Him to grant me life as a gift.

When it was my turn, the Nazi decided he wanted to smoke a cigarette. I saw this as Hashem listening to my davening, giving me more time to daven even harder. As I davened, suddenly the Nazi slipped on mud, falling and dirtying his clothes. More than the pain, he was deeply embarrassed by falling in front of the Jews, now covered in mud.

Cursing angrily, he went into a nearby room to clean himself. At that moment, no Nazis were watching us, and a local man quickly ran toward me, saying, 'Child, I want to save your life—come with me!'

At first, I was afraid to run away, fearing immediate death if caught. But then I realized that if I stayed, I had no natural chance of survival, whereas with this stranger, there was hope. I quickly went with him, and he hid me in a barn full of straw meant for animals, instructing me to wait quietly until he returned.

I waited there in terrible cold all day, hungry and thirsty. Throughout those hours, I heard the anguished cries of tortured Jews. I cried along with them, davening to Hashem to save us all. I promised Hashem that if He saved me, I would remain a G-d-fearing Jew, faithful to Him.

Late at night, the barn door opened, and the same man appeared—dressed in a Nazi uniform. Immediately he reassured me, saying, 'Do not be afraid! This uniform is just a disguise.' He then explained:

'My name is Alex. My mother is Jewish, and my father is German. The Nazis haven't yet discovered that my mother is Jewish, but I know eventually they will, and surely they will kill me. I know that according to Jewish law, I am a Jew, and I'm very afraid of the Yom Hadin

awaiting me in Heaven for having lived my life as a non-Jew. I promised Hashem that I would save one Jew from the Nazis, someone who would live according to His Torah, and that will be my merit.'

Alex asked me, 'If I save you, will you keep the Torah and the commandments?'

'Certainly!' I answered, and told him how much I had davened and promised Hashem to remain a herlicher Yid

'Then,' said Alex, 'get into my wagon, and I'll take you to a ship that will sail you to America.' Alex brought a wagon resembling those of the Nazis, complete with a horse, to avoid suspicion. He prepared food and water for me in the wagon. After eating and thanking Hashem, I thanked Alex too. He drove all night until we reached the ship.

At the port, Alex gave me some money and said, 'Naftali, be a kosher Yid, so that I will have a merit in Heaven.'

I asked him, 'Alex, what about you—where are you going?'

Alex replied, 'I'm returning home; I have a wife and children.'

'But you're returning to certain death—why go back?' I asked.

'I can't abandon my wife and children,' he answered.

'Is your wife Jewish?' I asked.

'No,' Alex sadly replied, 'she's a gentile.'

'Then come with me to America—you'll save your life and separate from your gentile wife,' I urged him.

Alex hesitated: 'I hadn't considered such a courageous step; besides, I have a home and money here.'

'But if you'll be killed anyway, what's all that worth?' I argued.

'You're right,' Alex agreed. He paced back and forth, deeply conflicted, until he firmly decided:

'I'm going with you.'

With Hashem's mercy, we arrived in America after a long journey. There, Alex entrusted me to a community rabbi, who arranged for a Jewish family to raise me and enrolled me in a Talmud Torah.

Many years passed. I reached age thirty-one and was still unmarried. One day, a match was suggested to me with a family of ba'alei teshuvah (newly observant Jews). Everything seemed suitable, and the girl's father wanted to meet me.

When we met, he introduced himself as Eliezer and asked my name. When I said 'Naftali' and mentioned that I'd been saved from the Holocaust by a man named Alex, he jumped up in astonishment: 'You're Naftali?!'

Confused, I said, 'Yes, how do you know me?'

It turned out that Eliezer was Alex himself! He told me that after leaving me with the rabbi, he traveled to another American city, studied Torah under a prominent Chassidic Rebbe, made teshuvah fully, and took the Yiddis name Eliezer, meaning "Hashem has helped," as Hashem had saved him and allowed him to save me. He married a Jewish woman, and the girl suggested as my match was his eldest daughter!

The excitement was indescribable—I had merited marrying the daughter of the very man who had saved my life.

Grandfather would tell this story twice each year—once on Purim and again at the Seder night. We grandchildren and my grandmother, who is still alive, greatly enjoyed hearing this miraculous story every time anew. He would conclude:

'See the immense power of davening—because I didn't despair but davened earnestly, Hashem granted salvation. And behold the power of kindness—my father-in-law's act of kindness benefited him both spiritually and materially.'

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