

KOVETZ

**HEOROS
HATMIMIM
V'ANASH**

ספרי

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PURIM KATAN

5774

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**HEOROS
HATMIMIM
V'ANASH**

~ Melbourne ~

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D'VAR MALCHUS

PURIM

Should Mordechai Have Sacrificed His Torah Study?

The *Megillah* concludes by describing Mordechai as: “favored by the majority of his brethren, seeking the welfare of his people, and speaking [words of] peace to all his seed.” Our Sages infer, however, that these words of praise contain a subtle hint of criticism: He was favored by “the majority of his brethren,” but not by all of his brethren. “Some of the *Sanhedrin* disassociated themselves from him,” because “he neglected the study of Torah, [not dedicating himself to study] as often as before, and becoming involved with government affairs.”

Our Sages continue, stating that with Mordechai’s assumption of court responsibilities, his station among the Sages declined; originally he was mentioned as fifth in stature among the Sages, and afterwards he was mentioned as the sixth. This leads the Sages to conclude that “the study of the Torah surpasses saving lives.”

This passage raises several questions: a) Since “the study of the Torah surpasses saving lives,” why was Mordechai demoted only one position? Why wasn’t he removed from the *Sanhedrin* entirely?

b) Why didn't Mordechai himself realize his failing and correct his behavior? Moreover, the above-mentioned verse indicates that he was "favored by the majority of his brethren." Although "some of the *Sanhedrin* disassociated themselves from him," the majority of his brethren, the Sages of the *Sanhedrin*, approved of Mordechai's course of action.

These questions lead to the conclusion that Mordechai's conduct was in fact considered desirable by the majority of the Sages, and it was appropriate for him to serve as one of the leading Sages of the *Sanhedrin*. Indeed, even those Sages who disassociated themselves from him did no more than that. They did not censure him, nor did they seek to have him rebuked. They did not maintain that Mordechai's approach was inconsistent with the Torah's ways, they merely sought a different path of Divine service for themselves.

The motivating principles for these two approaches can be traced to a difference of opinion between the *Babylonian Talmud* and the *Jerusalem Talmud*. The *Babylonian Talmud* states that the pious men of the early generations would spend nine hours every day praying, preparing themselves for this Divine service, and composing themselves afterwards. The Sages ask: Given this commitment of time, "How is their Torah protected, and how is their work conducted" (i.e., how was it possible that in the few short hours left them, they were able to maintain their level of Torah study, and support themselves financially)? And the Sages answer: "Since they were pious, their Torah (knowledge) was protected and their work was blessed."

The *Jerusalem Talmud* raises a similar question and explains: "Since they were pious, their study and their work were endowed with blessing."

The phrase “Their Torah (knowledge) was protected” in the *Babylonian Talmud* indicates that their piety prevented their Torah knowledge from being forgotten. In the brief time they had to study, they could not, however, advance further in the study of the Torah. The phrase used by the *Jerusalem Talmud*, “their study... [was] endowed with blessing,” by contrast, implies that they were also able to grow in their knowledge of Torah. Despite the minimal amount of time available to them, “they succeeded in understanding and comprehending ideas immediately, without delay.”

Thus there were some Sages who — following the approach of the *Babylonian Talmud* — saw Mordechai’s approach as necessary to maintaining the existence of the Jewish people, but as possessing an inherent limitation. It would lead to the preservation of the reservoir of Torah knowledge which he possessed, but not to its expansion. Therefore, they “disassociated themselves from him.”

The majority of the Sages — following the approach of the *Jerusalem Talmud* — realized that Mordechai’s self-sacrifice in taking on the yoke of court affairs would, like the piety of the Sages mentioned previously, bring blessing to his Torah study and enable him to advance to new frontiers. Therefore they continued to support him. Similarly, Mordechai himself, aware of this dynamic, persevered in his court responsibilities despite the spiritual sacrifice it entailed.

This difference of opinion between the *Jerusalem Talmud* and the *Babylonian Talmud* is not merely an isolated, specific issue, but points rather to a more encompassing difference in approach between the two *Talmuds*. Our Sages interpret the verse: “He has set me down in dark places,” as a reference to the *Babylonian Talmud*, for the *Babylonian Talmud* is characterized by darkness: questions and challenges, arguments

and disputes. Solutions are proposed and rejected in a lengthy process of analysis that can be compared to a person groping in the dark.

The *Jerusalem Talmud*, by contrast, is characterized by light. Concept follows concept in a natural progression. And when questions do arise, they are answered directly without an extensive process of search.

Based on the *Midrash*, it is possible to conclude that the difference between these approaches depends on “spiritual geography.” In *Eretz Yisrael*, spiritual truth is more apparent. As such: “No[where] is Torah study comparable to the Torah study of *Eretz Yisrael*. ” The spiritual darkness which characterizes Babylonia — and all lands of exile, by contrast, causes the search for truth to be more protracted, and to involve hypotheses which must ultimately be dismissed.

To relate these concepts to the issues mentioned above: Since the process of analysis which characterizes the *Babylonian Talmud* is lengthy and involved, it was impossible for the Sages of the *Babylonian Talmud* to conceive of a person progressing in Torah study without devoting a large block of time to this endeavor. Therefore, when considering the Torah study of “the pious men of the early generations,” they could not envision the possibility for growth. All they could see was that the attainments they had already achieved would be protected because of their piety.

On the other hand, the Sages of the *Jerusalem Talmud*, whose approach to Torah study was more focused and more direct, appreciated the possibility that a person could “succeed in understanding and comprehending ideas immediately, without delay.” Accordingly, the study of the pious could be “endowed with blessing” that would enable them to advance to new frontiers, instead of merely protecting the reservoirs of knowledge which they already possessed.

Since, as mentioned above, these two approaches are dependent on the spiritual influence of *Eretz Yisrael*, similar concepts can be explained with regard to Mordechai's involvement in the Persian court at the expense of his occupation with the study of the Torah. At the time of the Purim story, the *Sanhedrin*, the High Court in *Eretz Yisrael*, followed the approach to study which characterized the *Jerusalem Talmud*. Therefore, Mordechai and the majority of the other Sages of his era maintained that it was proper for him to sacrifice his complete involvement in the study of the Torah for the welfare of the Jewish people. They felt that the spiritual influence aroused by his efforts on behalf of his people would "endow his study with blessing" and he would be able to continue to progress in the study of the Torah despite his court duties.

There were at that time, as there were in the subsequent generations, Sages who came from Babylonia and whose pattern of thinking was nurtured in that land. Therefore they were unable to conceive of the possibility that Mordechai would grow in Torah study while burdened with the responsibilities placed upon him by Achashverosh. Accordingly, they "disassociated themselves from him" and sought other individuals to serve as spiritual mentors and guides.

There is, however, no question that Mordechai's court duties involved a certain dimension of spiritual sacrifice on his part, as reflected in his loss of position in the *Sanhedrin*. Even according to the approach of the *Jerusalem Talmud* which sees the possibility of Divine blessing enabling a person to continue to advance in Torah study despite a small investment of time, there is no question that a constant involvement in Torah study endows a person with a dimension of greatness that cannot be attained through any other endeavor.

In this vein, our Rabbis point to the uniqueness of those “whose Torah is their occupation,” who do not interrupt their study of the Torah for any reason whatsoever, for their study crowns them with a singular aura of personal magnitude. For this reason, our Sages say that “the study of the Torah surpasses saving lives,” for the dimension of greatness with which the study of Torah endows one is truly unsurpassable. Because he was forced to forego this dimension of personal greatness, Mordechai descended in stature among the Sages. Nevertheless, it was — in the opinion of Mordechai and the majority of the *Sanhedrin* — necessary for him to make this individual sacrifice for the welfare of the Jewish people at large.

A slight difficulty still remains: Although Mordechai’s court responsibilities did not prevent him from growing in the study of the Torah, and it was acceptable for him to sacrifice the personal greatness he could have attained for the sake of the welfare of the Jewish people, one might still suspect that he should have resigned his position in the *Sanhedrin* because of his court responsibilities. Seemingly, the *Sanhedrin* should be made up of individuals “whose Torah is their occupation.” Without discounting the virtue of Mordechai’s conduct and the necessity for it, one might presume that it is not befitting for a member of the *Sanhedrin*. On the surface, a member of that august body should have no other concern in life aside from the determination of Torah law.

This approach, however, misconstrues the purpose of the *Sanhedrin*. The purpose of the *Sanhedrin* was not to serve as an authority on Torah law in the abstract, aloof from the people at large. Instead, our Sages counseled that the members of the *Sanhedrin* should “gird their loins with

bands of steel, lift their robes above their knees, and traverse from city to city... to teach the Jewish people.”

Moreover, we find that undertaking such endeavors detracts from the *Sanhedrin's* authority, for a quorum of 23 judges are necessary to render decisions. For certain rulings, e.g., cases of capital punishment, can only be made when the *Sanhedrin* holds court in Jerusalem, next to the *Beis HaMikdash*. Nevertheless, this is the pattern advised by our Sages, to sacrifice the authority of the court, and have the judges travel from city to city to spur the nation to a deeper commitment to the Torah. Following a similar rationale, Mordechai was willing to sacrifice his own position in the *Sanhedrin* for the welfare of our people as a whole.

The Baal Shem Tov interpreted the *Mishnah*: “A person who reads the *Megillah* in a non-sequential order (*lemafreia*) does not fulfill his obligation” to mean that a person who considers the Purim saga as merely a chronicle of history without deriving a contemporary lesson does not fulfill his obligation. Instead, the directives to be derived from the *Megillah*, including its final verse, are relevant in all times, and in all places.

A Jewish leader must know that his main concern is not his personal greatness, nor the contributions to Torah study that he can make, but the welfare of the Jewish people as a whole. When a leader commits himself to this goal, he should not be deterred by the fact that “some of the *Sanhedrin* disassociate themselves from him.” Instead, he should persevere in his efforts, confident that “since [he is] pious, [his] study and [his] work [will be] endowed with blessing.” He will be given Divine assistance to advance the frontiers of Torah study, and his “work,” his efforts on behalf of his brethren, will be crowned with success

(Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XVI, p. 373ff.)

CHUMASH

Tzaddikim's words happen even with a condition

Why did Rivka live to 122 while Yitzchak lived much longer (180)?

HaTomim Levi Szmerling

Talmid in Mesiota, Ohlai Yosef Yitzchok Lubavitch

We know that the reason Sara died younger (127) than Avraham (175) was due to the Ayin Hara that she placed on Hogor causing her to miscarry. Mida kneged midda Hashem caused Sara to die prematurely. So too, there must be a reason behind why Rivka died at a younger age than Yitzchak.

How do we know Rivka died at 122 years old?

Rashi says [Breishis 35:8] that Rivka died when Yaakov was nearing Beis Kel on his way back home from Lovon's house. Rivka got married at 3 and had Yaakov and Eisav at 23 [Breishis 25:20 Rashi and ibid posuk 26]. Yaakov was 99 when he arrived home [Breishis 28:9] Rashi explains that if Yaakov was 99 when his mother, Rivka, died, then Rivkah was 122 when she died.

So, the question remains. Why didn't Rivka merit to live as long as Yitzchak?

Perhaps we can suggest the following, since she said to Yaakov "if Yitzchak curses you, on me will be the curse". Even though

Yitzchak didn't actually curse Yaakov the curse nevertheless adversely affected Rivka.

We see something similar in regards to Yehuda and Moshe:

Rashi asks [Breishis 47:2] who were the weakest of the brothers? According to the 1st opinion the weak brothers were those who Moshe mentioned only **once** in his brocha. According to the 2nd opinion those whose names were doubled were the strong ones. However, Yehuda was considered a strong brother [Breishis 38:18] so why did Moshe double Yehuda's name when blessing the tribes? Bava Kamma 92A explains that the first mention of Yehuda's name signifies Moshe's prayer that the banishment that Yehuda accepted upon himself when he guaranteed the wellbeing of Benyamin "and if I don't bring him back I will not get olam habba" to be cancelled. Although the statement was conditional his olam habba was nevertheless still at risk. Due to this the entire 40 years in the midbar Yehuda was rolling in his coffin until Moshe said Yehuda's name a second time and his prayer was accepted.

Another proof that a tzaddik's words are fulfilled even though they are conditional is clear in that Moshe's name is not written throughout the entire Parshas Tzave. This occurred since Moshe said "if you don't forgive the Jews, erase my name" [Shmos 32:32]. Although Hashem ultimately forgave Jews his name was still erased.

The lesson for us:

1) We should be careful with what we say.

2) If G-d is so exact regarding the word of a tzaddik for bad, even if it was said in a conditional manner, how much more so is Hashem exact for the good. Specifically all the prophets, until the promise of Moshiach's coming, may Hashem fulfill it now!

