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Fulfilling OUR TORAH POTENTIAL

by *Rabbi Joel Grossman*

This past Motza'ei Shabbat, we read Megillat Esther in celebration of the holiday of Purim. The last Rambam describing the laws of the Megillah (Hilchot Megillah VeChanukah 2:18) writes, "Kol Sifrei HaNevi'im VeChol HaKetuvim Atidin Libatel LiY'mot HaMashi'ach Chutz MiMegillat Esther, VeHarei Hi Kayemet KeChamisha Chumshei Torah UKeHalachot Shel Torah SheBeAl Peh, SheEinan Beteilin LeOlam," "In the time of Mashiach, all the books of the Nevi'im and Ketuvim will become null and void except for Megillat Esther, which will last forever and will never become nullified, like the five books of the Torah and the Oral Torah."

I would like to share with you a beautiful message that we can learn from the Mitzvah of reading Megillah that I heard from the Rav when I was privileged to be in his Shiur. The Gemara (Megillah 3a) states "Samchu Beit Rebbi SheMevatin Talmud Torah UVA'im LiShmo'a Mikra Megillah," we learn from the Yeshivah of Rebbi that the Mitzvah of hearing the Megillah is so important that one must stop learning Torah in order to hear the Megillah. The Rav asked: how is it possible that the learning of Torah is stopped--if we can fulfill the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah by hearing the Keri'at HaTorah on Monday and Thursday mornings, should we not be able to fulfill the Mitzvah of Talmud Torah by hearing the Megillah? The Rav quoted the Rashash's and the Maharatz Chayot's answers to this question. The Rashash explains that we have a concept of "*BeRov Am Hadrat Melech*," "where there is a multitude of people there is more glory to the King" (Mishlei 14:28), with regards to the Megillah. At the Yeshivah of Rebbi there were many students, but at the Shul in the city, there were far more people. The Bitul Torah refers to the time spent traveling from the Yeshivah into the city to the Shul. Alternatively, according to the Maharatz Chayot, Rebbi missed the reading of the Megillah while the students did not. Therefore, Rebbi found himself in a dilemma when he was supposed to give Shiur: should he present Shiur and thus miss the Megillah reading, or should he hear the Megillah and cause the Bitul Torah of his students? (Everyone knows that when the Rebbe is away, the students will play.)

The Rav was not partial to either explanation, as these were the students of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, who surely would have

learned while traveling to the Shul or while their Rebbe was not with them. The Rav therefore explained that when someone learns Torah at an unbecoming level to that person, it constitutes Bitul Torah. For the students of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi who could learn Mishnayot with all of the pertinent insights, learning a story that they already knew would constitute Bitul Torah. Yet, the eternal Mitzvah of Megillah is so important that learning must be stopped in order to hear it, since it teaches us that Hashem controls everything, even when He is behind the scenes and is not performing open miracles.

The Gemara (Kiddushin 40b) states that after we pass away, the first thing for which we will be punished is Divrei Torah, the quantity and quality of the Torah that we have learned. May we all learn this important message of what it means to learn Torah properly so that we can all reach our full potential in Torah learning.

I hope that everyone had a wonderful Purim, fulfilling each of its four Mitzvot and gaining the strength to remember the message of the Megillah throughout the year.

READING THE MEGILLAH WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RAV

by *Avi Cooper* ('17)

Rav Soloveitchik, in his seminal essay "Lonely Man of Faith," presents a weltanschauung in which man is an inherently dialectical being, existing with two seemingly exclusive goals. The Rav expounds the two contradictory accounts of the creation of Adam in Chapters I and II of Bereishit as presenting the creation of two different beings, Adam I and Adam II, both of whom are contained within all humans. Adam I "acquires dignity through glory, through his majestic posture vis-à-vis his environment [and his peers]" (Lonely Man of Faith, pp. 15). "His motto is success, triumph over the cosmic forces. He engages in creative work, trying to imitate his creator" (op. cit., pp. 15). In short, Adam I is a public figure, collaborating with others of his kind in an attempt to subdue the world and push an agenda. On the other hand, Adam II "is receptive and beholds the world in its original dimensions" (op. cit., pp. 22). He senses a certain "separateness from nature," (op. cit., pp. 23-24) and a divide between himself and the outgoing Adam I, who is tasked with subduing the world. However, as the Rav writes, "the objective and hence the motivation are identical. Both Adams want to be human. Both strive to be themselves, to be what God commanded them to be, namely man." "Both Adams are equally provoked by the mystery of [God's] Being." (op. cit., pp. 23) And this commonality in ultimate goal, no matter how disparate in method

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of achievement, allows for, and requires a “steady oscillating between the majestic and natural community [of Adam I] and the covenantal faith community [of Adam II]” (op. cit., pp. 75-76). Within each human are both Adam I and Adam II, and each human must find ways to excel at both and to transition smoothly between them when necessary.

We can apply this philosophy to the narrative of Megillat Esther in order to explain the transition of Esther from the secluded, passive woman presented in the beginning of the Megillah to the outgoing savior of the Jews that she becomes towards the middle and the end of the Megillah. In short, she embodies the dialectical-human reality of a Lonely Woman of Faith and a Majestic Unreserved Woman, straddling these two roles throughout the narrative of the Megillah. Additionally of note is the fact that when Esther adopts one of these two personalities, Mordechai adopts the opposite. When he adopts Adam I, she adopts the worldview of Adam II, and vice versa. Finally, we must remember when observing Esther’s and Mordechai’s actions and correlating them to the weltanschauung of either Adam I or Adam II that though Adam II’s ontological experience is both broad and refined, and is at times more meaningful than Adam I, the third person objective viewpoint of the Megillah’s narrator can only present his or her physical, exposed layer. From the outside, Adam II is seen as a flat character, quiet and secluded, even while he is fraught with inner emotional whirlwinds.

By carefully reading the text of the Megillah, we can observe these philosophical transformations in action. When we are first presented with Esther’s character, we see a passive woman, in many respects a puppet played by others. Towards the beginning of the Megillah, we read “*Asher Lekachah Mordechai Lo LeVat*”, “[Esther] had been taken by Mordechai as a daughter” (Esther 2:7). Mordechai takes Esther as a daughter, but from Esther’s perspective, she was taken. While it is true that this particular conjugation of the verb makes sense in this context, the adult does take initiative in adopting the orphan. Additionally, while it is true that in the other instances of Esther’s passivity one could similarly rationalize her actions, Esther’s constant submissiveness is telling of her personality: “*VaTilakach Esther El Beit HaMelech*”, “and Esther was taken to the king’s palace,” (2:7) and “*Lo Higgidah Esther Et Amah VeEt Moladetah...Ki Mordechai Tzivah Aleha Asher Lo Tagid*,” “Esther did not reveal her nationality because Mordechai had commanded her not to do so” (2:11) are two of the more conspicuous examples of Esther’s passivity in the same chapter. In each instance, Esther is acted upon instead of being the actor, and even when given a choice, she again defers: “*UVeHaggi’a Tor Esther...Lo Bikshah Davar, Ki Im Et Asher Yomar Heigai Seris HaMelech*,” “When Esther’s turn arrived... she requested nothing [to take to the king], except for what Heigai, the chief of the women, suggested” (2:16). It is clear from the initial presentation of Esther’s character that she is a passive woman. But at the same time, Esther is not a simple woman. This appearance is only a function of the resolving power of the scope of a third person narrator. We

see nothing of her emotions--only of her actions--and in the action that we are privy to, we see that she acts much like an Adam II.

On the other hand, Mordechai at first seems to be a diametrically opposite character. When first presented, it is he who controls the life of Esther, as explained above. But his taking initiative and nonconformism is not limited to the private sphere: “*VeChol Avdei HaMelech...Kor’im UMishtachavim LeHaman...UMordechai Lo Yichra VeLo Yishtachaveh*,” “And all servants of the king were bowing to Haman, but Mordechai would not” (3:2). In addition to this public display of action at the palace, in Rabbinic thought, Mordechai was a leader of the Jewish community. Whereas Esther embodies Adam II’s outlook, passivity replacing action, Mordechai does the opposite, taking on a very public role as a true Adam I.

But when events take a turn for the worse, both Mordechai and Esther are forced to swing the pendulum of their personalities in the opposite direction. When Mordechai learns of Haman’s decree to kill the Jews the Megillah writes, “*VaYikra Mordechai Et Begadav, VaYilbash Sak VaEifer*,” “And Mordechai ripped his clothing and donned sackcloth and ashes” (4:1). He assumes the posture of a mourner and strips himself of majestic royalty to the degree that he cannot enter the king’s palace (see 4:2). This status of a mourner is addressed by the Rav in a separate essay, “Majesty and Humility,” where he delineates the dialectic of Majestic Man and Humble Man, a dialectic that closely resembles that of Adam I and Adam II. In his description of Humble Man, correlating to Adam II, he writes “with the arrival of the dark night of the soul, in moments of agony and black despair, when living becomes ugly and absurd... God addresses him, not from infinity but from the infinitesimal” (Majesty and Humility, pp. 33). This black despair that Mordechai is forced to face humbles him, knocking him into an Adam II state of mind, and accordingly prohibits him from standing up for the Jewish people as their leader and representative. Instead, he understands that the role of leader and spokesperson has now been transferred to the demure Queen Esther, and he sets out to guide her on her own path from Adam II’s weltanschauung to Adam I’s.

When Mordechai, through a messenger, informs Esther of the dire straits within which the Jews find themselves, she resists Mordechai’s implicit request to take action. She explains that approaching the king, stepping out of her “Daled Amot” and breaking the rules, would most likely result in her death. Even when faced with the mass genocide of her people, she cannot see past the aloneness of Adam II. She is not yet a leader. But transformed Mordechai, humble, mourning Adam II, pushes on. He admonishes her, “*Ki Im Hachareish Tacharishi*,” “for if you will be quiet” (4:14), if you continue to act as a passive Adam II, “*At UVeit Avich Toveidu; UMi Yodei’a Im LeEit KaZot Higgat LeMalchut*,” “both you and your father’s house will be destroyed. Who can tell if it was for this very moment that you were granted Queenship?” At this point, Esther acquiesces. She adopts the mentality of an Adam I and issues her first command as a leader: “*Lech Kenos Et Kol HaYehudim HaNimtzehim BeShushan VeTzumu Alai*,” “Go and gather all the Jews who reside in Shushan and fast on my behalf” (4:16). It is with this “oscillation” in personality

that Esther rises to the occasion and assumes her role as savior of the Jews. She boldly treads into the king's throneroom, manipulates Achashverosh and Haman into attending her banquets, and accuses the second-most powerful man in the kingdom of one hundred twenty seven provinces of genocide, effectively sentencing him to death and ensuring that the Jewish people live on.

NO PAIN NO GAIN? A HALACHIC ANALYSIS OF WHEN TO PERFORM MITZVOT ASEI THAT CAUSE PAIN: PART I

by Netanel Lederer ('11)

A fascinating question that arises especially on Pesach is, how much pain must one tolerate in order to perform a Mitzvat Asei (positive command)? For instance, those who suffer from celiac disease cannot eat anything with gluten, which precludes them from eating regular wheat Matzah. Instead they eat oat Matzah to fulfill their obligation of eating Matzah on the first evening of Pesach. What if they cannot even tolerate the oat Matzah or they do not have access to it—must they consume the regular wheat Matzah? Does the same apply to someone who does not suffer from celiac but has a gluten sensitivity or gluten intolerance? What if people have difficulty fasting—are they obligated to fast on Yom Kippur if it will inevitably cause them to be bedridden for a week? What if performing this Mitzvah will cause them to miss several other Mitzvot which they would have been able to perform otherwise? To answer all of these questions we have to discover the Gedarim (parameters) for how much pain one must tolerate in order to perform Mitzvot Asei.

Since the Halachah might be different regarding different levels of Tza'ar (pain), we will attempt to break down the different levels of sickness into different categories (and will reference them as such):

- Category #1: Sakanat Nefashot (danger to life; Choleh SheYeish Bo Sakana)
- Category #2: Sakanat Eiver (danger of losing a limb)
- Category #3: Irreparable damage to the body (creation of a chronic condition)
- Category #4: Nofeil LeMishkav (bedridden, sick for a while, but expected to fully recover)
- Category #5: Meichush, Mitzta'eir (mild to moderate ache and pain)

To begin, in a case of Sakanat Nefashot, where there is a possibility that by performing the Mitzvah the individual at hand may die, the person is undoubtedly exempt from the Mitzvah. The Torah (VaYikra 18:5) states that the Mitzvot are performed in order "VeChai BaHem," to live by them. The Gemara (Yoma 85b) explains that this implies that the Mitzvot are to meant for us to live for them, "VeLo SheYamut Bahem" not to die for them. However, as we will see, the Halachah is unclear regarding performing Mitzvot Asei which might cause other gradations of sickness.

When we examine a specific Mitzvah, it will be imperative to ask whether this Mitzvah is unique or whether its rules can be extrapolated to other Mitzvot.

Arba Kosot and Maror

The Gemara (Nedarim 49b) records that Rabi Yehudah would drink the Arba Kosot (four cups of wine at the Seder) and would experience Tza'ar (pain or discomfort) all the way until Shavu'ot. The Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1) notes that Rabbi Yonah drank four Kosot at the Seder and "Chazik Reishei," he experienced a headache, until Shavu'ot, and that Rabbi Yehudah consumed the Arba Kosot and was in a state of "Chazik Reishei" until Sukkot. Thus, the Tana'im would drink the four Kosot in order to perform the Mitzvat Asei even though doing so caused them considerable pain.

However, the precise meaning of the term Chazik Reishei is not clear. Does it mean that they merely had a headache and therefore would fall under Category 5, or was it more intense than that, perhaps even a Category 4 level of pain?

The Rashba rules that one must make every effort to drink the four Kosot even if it will cause him Tza'ar or he finds the drinking to be distasteful.¹ The Shulchan Aruch codifies this ruling.²

The Mishnah Berurah explains that the kind of Tza'ar that one must suffer in order to perform the Mitzvah of consuming the Arba Kosot is such that he will be "Ko'eiv BeRosh," experiencing a headache (Category 5). He states that the Gemara is not talking about a case of SheYipol LeMishkav (Category 4).³ It would seem at first glance that perhaps we can extrapolate from the Arba Kosot to all other Mitzvot Asei, that one should be Patur (excused) from the Mitzvah should he be faced with a Category 4 level of sickness. However, in his Sha'ar HaTziyun, the Mishnah Berurah qualifies that the reason a consumer should not drink the Arba Kosot if it will render him a Nofeil LeMishkav is because this is not Derech Cheirut, the manner of a free person,⁴ a rule unique to Arba Kosot. Therefore, when this consideration is irrelevant, it would seem that one would be Mechuyav (obligated) to perform a Mitzvah even if it means risking his fall into at least a Category 4 type of illness!

On the other hand, when it comes to eating Maror, the Mishnah Berurah writes that if one cannot tolerate Maror due to health concerns, he should eat just a little bit or chew a bit in order to experience the bitter taste.⁵ It is unclear exactly as to what level of health the Mishnah Berurah is referring, but it seems that he is talking about Category 4 type.⁶ It seems from the Mishnah Berurah that one should be Patur from Mitzvot if he thereby risks a Category 4 level sickness! This seems to contradict the earlier Mishnah Berurah regarding Arba Kosot that seemingly said that one would have to be

¹ Teshuvot HaRashba 1:238

² Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 472:10

³ Mishnah Berurah 472:35

⁴ Sha'ar HaTziyun 472:52

⁵ Mishnah Berurah 473:43

⁶ Piskei Teshuvot 473:19, Minchat Asher Parashat VaYeitzei Siman 39



Nofeil LeMishkav in order to perform a Mitzvah! Twentieth- and twenty-first-century Poskim posit different resolutions for this seeming contradiction:

1) Rav Asher Weiss offers as a possibility that the reason the Sha'ar HaTziyun rules that a person should not drink Arba Kosot if they will cause him to be Nofeil LeMishkav, that it is not Derech Cheirut, is merely an additional reason that he should be Mefutar. However, the standard Halachah is that one is not obligated to risk falling into a Category 4 type of Sakana in order to perform a Mitzvat Asei.⁷

2) Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank explains that regarding Arba Kosot, one could have argued that just as one is obligated to sell the shirt off his back in order to fulfill this Mitzvah which involves Pirsumai Nisa⁸ (publicizing a miracle), so too, he would also be obligated to risk slipping into a Category 4 type of illness. Therefore, the Sha'ar HaTziyun had to explain that if he were to fall into a Category 4 type of illness, that would not be Derech Cheirut, and he would not fulfill the Mitzvah. Nevertheless, regarding all other Mitzvot, one is obligated only to risk a Category 5 type of illness. Therefore, what emerges is that regarding a mitzvah that involves Pirsumei Nisa, one even would be obligated to slip into a Category 4 type of illness; however, in a standard Mitzvah, one is only obligated to the extent of falling into a Category 5 type of illness.⁹

3) Rav Asher Weiss and Rav Shternbach offer another possibility: the reason the Mishnah Berura mentions Derech Cheirut in the context of the Arba Kosot is to teach that if a person decides to be Machmir, stringent, he does not fulfill the Mitzvah since it is not performed in a Derech Cheirut. This stands in contrast to other Mitzvot, where one would still have fulfilled the Mitzvah had it made him sick. Perhaps regarding other Mitzvot there would be a Middat Chassidut (higher level of piety) to drink even if it would cause a Category 4 type of illness.¹⁰

4) Rav Scheinberg explains that the difference between the Arba Kosot case and Maror case is that in the Maror case, he was already sick, and therefore the Mishnah Berurah says that if Maror would affect his health, he is excused; however, if he is healthy right now and will only going to get sick later by performing this Mitzvah, he would be obligated.¹¹

⁷ Minchat Asher (ibid.) suggests this as a possibility. However, it seems a bit forced, since if this is correct, why did the Mishnah Berurah mention Derech Cheirut?

⁸ Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 472:13

⁹ Mikrei Kodosh Pesach 2:32, Minchat Asher ibid., and Rav Shternbach (Halachah URefu'ah Vol. 4 p.147) also suggest this as a possibility. However, Mor UKetzi'ah and Rav Sheinberg in Halachah URefu'ah Vol. 4 pp. 125-126 reject such a distinction.

¹⁰ Minchat Asher ibid. and Rav Shternbach in Halachah U'Refu'ah ibid.

¹¹ Rav Scheinberg (cited in Halachah URefuah ibid.) explains that this is possibly the distinction, although he does not regard our two citations from the Mishnah Berurah as contradicting one another. However, this distinction is a bit difficult to understand because the Mishnah Berurah states that a Choleh or Istinis (one who is unable to tolerate pain and discomfort) is excused. It would appear that an Istinis in this case refers to someone who has an unusual reaction to eating Maror that he would become a Choleh. This seems no different than Rabbi Yehudah's reaction to the wine of the Arba Kosot.

It seems that if we adopt explanations 1-3 of the view of the Mishnah Berurah, those that may be led to Category 4 by performing a Mitzvat Asei would be excused (although according to explanation #2, only if it is not a Mitzvah that involves Pirsumei Nisa). However, according to explanation #4, a healthy individual is not excused from performing Mitzvot Asei even if the Mitzvah will cause him Tza'ar.

Conclusion

Because the Mishnah Berurah's approach is a bit ambiguous, we must examine other situations in which Tza'ar is involved when fulfilling Mitzvot.¹² In addition, our discussion has been limited to Mitzvot Asei which are DeRabannan (rabbinic in origin); perhaps the Halachah would not be the same regarding a DeOraita, Torah-level obligation.

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¹² In fact, Minchat Asher ibid. concludes that he is unsure. He asks, how did the Mishnah Berurah know that if the drinker is experiencing a Category 4 type of sickness, that is not called Derech Cheirut, but if he experiences a Category 5 type of sickness, that that this is called Derech Cheirut?