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Head in the Clouds
Rachel Laury

There Rivkah was, trotting along on her camel, Sal, when all of a sudden, a shadow fell upon the ground. She looked up, only to fall right off her dromedary in bewilderment at the sight. Before her very eyes was Yitzchak, walking out of Gan Eden with his head to the ground and his feet to the sky (Sefer Paneach Raza).

Wow, what a screenplay. Talk about venahafoch hu! What is Yitzchak doing walking around upside down? What's more, Yitzchak's name points out another brainteaser. We know him as the father of strict judgement and seriousness, yet his name means laughter. What kind of ironic twist of fate was Hashem trying to play on Yitzchak's mother? It seems like she was expecting a more jovial son than she got!

Hold on to that thought for a second, and let's shift scenes to the times of Rabbi Akiva. We know of three times that Rabbi Akiva laughed when his friends were crying - once when Yerushalayim fell into the hands of the idolaters, once when a fox was walking out of the kodesh hakodashim, and once when the sage Rabbi Eleazar took ill. To me, that sounds like a friend of mine whose knee-jerk reaction to someone falling down the stairs is uncontrollable laughter. Even when that someone is herself.

Why did Rabbi Akiva react in such a contradictory way?

It might seem that the central purpose of Purim, and of all Jewish holidays, and of life in general, is to expand our cookbook collections. Rav Shimshon Pinkus, however, alleges otherwise, observing that the objective of Purim and other holidays is to forge a connection between Hashem and His nation. These days are meant to strengthen the G-d/us relationship. There is, however, one major barricade to that connection: teva, or the way the world works according to nature. How's that?

Simple - just breathe and you'll figure it out. We cannot live without air. We can all agree that air is the most basic and most essential part of life. If that's the case, then why don't we rave more about this incredible gift? Why is it that we have a whole parade for a department store but not for an essential component of all living matter? We should be so grateful for this element, and yet it is grossly undervalued.

Rav Pinkus answers this fallacy with an allegory. A guest sees a plate full of cakes, prepared by his host. He can have two suppositions: either the host set out twenty cakes for

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twenty people including this guest, or he put them all out for the one guest to take as he pleases. Think of air as these Duncan Hines products. Hashem created air specifically for you, His “guest,” but He has reasons to want to hide this chessed, so He created millions more air molecules encompassing the whole world. It’s up to us to realize the individual specificity of this chessed. We don’t write odes to air because we think of it as a gift given to everyone, not just to ourselves. With this mindset, it is easy to ignore how special it is.

This is the venahafoch hu of Purim, the time when the truth is revealed. We have to overturn everything we see as mere nature and view it as the reality it is. On Purim we tell ourselves, “Hashem lovingly placed that carton of milk right there, for me,” even when we find it amongst 499 other cartons. Because we live in a world of choshech, darkness, Hashem hides his actions and places the milk carton amongst another 499.

The Megillah, an etymological cousin of gilui, revelation, teaches us to redefine teva and reveal within it the connection and love between Hashem and His children. Right from the beginning of the text we see this, when we see Achashverosh moving his entire capital from Bavel to Shushan just because that’s where Mordechai lived. Hashem made that happen by causing the king to desire an imitation of King Shlomo’s throne, find that it was too heavy to move, and, consequently, need to move to where the throne was so his stonemasons could copy it. Hashem’s name doesn’t appear in the entire Megillah, in line with the choshech rule. In a classic venahafoch hu, this darkness actually shows us the pinnacle of Hashem’s love for us.

Moshe Rabbeinu’s soul didn’t want to leave him because it felt a greater closeness to Hashem in this world than right under the Throne of Glory, next to Hashem. The angels know the truth of teva. Our souls know this truth. Our human bodies don’t. We all have our feet on the ground, with most of us starting from the ground before reaching Heaven. Yitzchak was living the opposite reality, coming from Heaven with the intent of finding Hashem within nature. Yitzchak’s name means laughter - he would find the attitude of this world amusing, where everyone thinks opposite from the way he should. Yitzchak knew that Hashem is here, in every single breath, cake, and milk carton. Rabbi Akiva laughed as well. His colleagues were upset because they felt the coldness of choshech and did not clearly see the hashgachah of Hashem. Rabbi Akiva countered them, saying that, if you think about it, it’s actually the opposite! If you search for the light within that darkness, you’ll see that it’s right in there – that we can find the love Hashem has for His children even within the realm of darkness and concealment.

It is a responsibility incumbent upon each of us to search for Hashem within teva. Hashem wants to hide Himself, so He created enough air for 7 billion people. In truth, everyone has to feel that this gift is for him, and he should thank Hashem for every single breath … and for every single time he falls down the stairs.

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“Hashem wants to hide Himself, so He created enough air for 7 billion people.”

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The Joy in Passion

By Chaya Tessler

All of us have heard and said the passuk, “And the Jews had light and happiness and joy and honor”. Many of us have heard what the gemara has to say about it, that these four words correspond to four mitzvos that the Jews reaccepted with love at the time of the Purim miracle – “אורה זו תורה שמחה זה יום טוב ששון זו מילה ויקר” light represents Torah, happiness is yom tov, joy is bris milah, and honor is tefillin. But if that’s what was meant, then why is that not what was said? The passuk before had already stated that the Jews were happy about being saved from Haman, so why do these expressions of happiness need to be used to describe the mitzvos they reaccepted as a result? In order to understand this, we must first go back to the root of the problem. We must first understand what the spiritual struggle was at the time of Purim and how we resolved it. Only then can we understand the results and why they are described in these words.

The struggle at the time of Purim was between Bnei Yisroel and Amalek, specifically the unique power of Amalek is קרירות, coolness. From its first appearance in Tanach, this nation dampens any form of inspiration, cools down our reactions to spirituality, and decreases the fire and passion we have for Torah and mitzvos. When we become “cool” about the mitzvos, we may do them, but without feeling. And if some slightly compelling reason arises as to why we shouldn’t do them, we give in without putting up much of a fight.

At the time of the Purim miracle, the Jews weren’t bad. They were sleeping. When Haman spoke of the Jewish people to Achashverosh, he referred to them with the words, “there is one people.” Chazal tell us that the word ישון is related to the word שינה, sheinah, which means sleep. What were we sleepy about? ישנים מן המצוות—we were doing the mitzvos, but in a sleeping, limp, unenthusiastic way. Purim was not a time at which we were assimilated or doing any horrific aveiros. It was a time at which we were going through the motions, doing what we needed to do. But we were missing the enthusiasm and joy, the feeling that we are so lucky to be living as part of Hashem’s chosen nation. Without the passion for the mitzvos, we were not as committed.

Therefore, when Haman insisted that everyone bow down to him – and, by extension, to the idol he wore around his neck – it was easier to rationalize than to fight against the command. Almost every Jew gave in to his demands. Now, let’s clarify something: no one actually believed in the idol and bowed down to Haman in order to worship it. But neither did they truly feel their own belief in G-d. Someone who is truly inspired and actively feels his emunah will not treat it so lightly. There was one man who retained his fiery passion, and that was Mordechai, who staunchly refused to bow to Haman. His strong belief in Hashem enabled him to stand strong in his conviction that to bow to Haman and his idol would be wrong.

It was not immediately apparent to Bnei Yisroel that something about their actions was wrong. However, it became abundantly clear when they were faced with the threat of national annihilation by Haman and his followers. They knew they had to do teshuvah, but for what, and how? Esther provided the answer. Before she went to Achashverosh to plead on behalf of her nation, she told Bnei Yisroel that first they had to do their part – they had to fast and pray for three days. Davening is often called avodah she-be-lev; it is an internal experience. For our words

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- Chaya Tessler
to truly have an effect, we must wake up our emotions and really feel the words we are speaking. We must deepen our connection to the One to whom we speak. We could no longer afford to remain as cool and detached as we had been.

The miracle that Hashem brought about in answer to our prayers was meant to help us finish this process. All of a sudden, all the events of the past twelve years, which had seemed so mundane, came together in a brilliant and complex tapestry. Suddenly, we saw with clarity that Hashem had been planning our salvation longer than our enemies had been planning our demise. This recognition rekindled our enthusiasm and excitement. We remembered how lucky we are to be the people of the Master of the World, Who takes care of us and tells us that if we do as He asks, we will benefit, because it is the best way to live in this world.

Now, we are ready to understand why the megillah used the words it did to describe our joy in being saved from Haman, in seeing the overarching miraculous plan that G-d had had in mind long before we had an inkling of our own troubles. The Sfas Emes answers the earlier question on the words “ליודים היתה אורה ושמחה.” The chiddush did not lie in the mitzvos themselves, as Bnei Yisroel had already been keeping them for hundreds of years, since matan Torah. The chiddush was the feeling behind those actions. As a result of the miracle, Klal Yisroel now felt the light of Torah, the happiness of Yom Tov, the joy of bris milah, and the honor of tefillin. The true happiness of Purim is not a flighty, superficial one. It is the deep recognition that we are so lucky to be who we are and to live our lives the way we do. When we face the challenges of Amalek, when we begin to lose enthusiasm for Torah and mitzvos, we must remember—אשרינו מה טוב חל公園ו—how fortunate are we to be Jews, to live so closely with G-d! With this in mind, may we all be zocheh to feel the passion and joy of Purim, to know that what we are doing is right and to be able to do it with everything we have!

The Lessons of Zayin Adar
By Reena Evans

There is a day that sneaks in the week before Purim, the significance of which is not widely known. The seventh of Adar (zayin Adar) is the day of Moshe Rabbeinu's birth and death, and has many important messages to teach us.

Nothing is a coincidence, and the day of zayin Adar has a historic and thematic connection to the main focus of the month, Purim. When Haman drew lots to decide when would be the best time to enact his plans of genocide against the Jewish people, he came up with the month of Adar. This seemed perfect – an auspicious month for his plans, as nothing had occurred in Adar that gave the Jews any special merits. In fact, Moshe Rabbeinu had died in Adar, a great loss to the Jewish people. However, what Haman did not know is that Moshe was also born in Adar. On the day of a person's birth he has extra mazal, as evinced by the custom of giving berachos on one's birthday. On zayin Adar, it is appropriate to contemplate some of the middos of Moshe Rabbeinu and attributes of his life. Though not necessarily a sad day, it is a serious one that calls

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for deep thinking. There are even some tzaddikim who fast on the seventh of Adar in order to effect atonement for the Jewish people, as adding fasting and special prayers to the day of the death of a tzaddik is something known to bring kapparah.

The first lesson of this day is learned from Moshe’s birth. At that time, Pharaoh had instituted a decree that every baby boy be drowned in the Nile. Amram and the rest of the men in Klal Yisrael divorced their wives so as not to have children who were marked for death. It was only due to Miriam’s intervention that Amram and Yocheved remarried, believing her word as a prophetess that the son they would have was destined to save Israel. Moshe was born, but things still looked bleak as the only way to save him from the Egyptians was to put him in a basket in the river. Even more, he was saved by the daughter of Pharaoh and raised in the palace, where he may very well have been raised to be the worst enemy of his own people! Yet Moshe emerged as the savior he was meant to be. It is on the day of his birth that we take the opportunity to reflect on hashgachah in Jewish history and in our own lives.

The seforim bring down an important point connected with Moshe Rabbeinu’s life and the time period of his death: the exacting nature of Divine judgement. Rabbeinu Bachye says that when Moshe put himself on the line and begged Hashem to spare the Jewish people after the chet ha-egel, he said, “ָּׂ אִם תִשָּׂא חַטָּׂאתָּׂם וְאִם אַיִן מְחֵנִי נָּׂא מִסִפְרְךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּׂתָּׂבְת” , “If You will bear their sin, and if not, erase me please from Your Book which You have written” (Shemos 32:32). Hashem is incredibly exacting with the words of tzaddikim, and though it was only a conditional curse and Bnei Yisrael were ultimately forgiven, Moshe’s name is absent from one parashah in the Torah – Parashas Tetzaveh, which is read the week during which zayin Adar falls. When we read the parashah that is all about the mishkan in which Moshe played such a central yet unmentioned role, we should understand the power of words, that even an unfulfilled curse can have such a strong effect. There is a sense of awe and respect that comes with recognizing the stringent standards to which Hashem holds tzaddikim. This is something from which all of us can learn, as well as strengthen our own yiras shamayim, particularly when it comes to the care with which we must speak.

Another lesson of zayin Adar is contemplation of Moshe’s hallmark anavah, humility; "ָּׂ והאיש מְשָׁה עָּׂנָּׂיו מְאֹד מִכֹל הָּׂאָּׂדָּׂם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְנֵי הָּׂאֲדָּׂמָּׂה" “and the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth” (Bamidbar 12:3). Moshe always put the spotlight on Hashem, never on himself. He is the embodiment of the middos of tzniyus and anavah. Humility and modesty are about not flaunting what one is and has, but instead being mevatel oneself before Hashem to be a receptacle for real spirituality and Hashem’s glory. It is a worldview of the centrality of making Hashem’s Name great in the world, not mine. Moshe, the humblest man who

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ever lived, was thus the greatest receptacle for *kedushah*, the one who spoke to *Hashem* "face to face" and received the *Torah*. *Purim* is about the *nes nistar*, the hidden miracles, where *Hashem* conceals Himself. A week before *Purim* we learn from *Moshe* to be *misdameh* to *Hashem* in this way, to be humble and modest and therefore be a vessel to bring *Hashem*’s light into the world instead of covering it up with our own egos.

There is a fascinating hint to *Moshe Rabbeinu* in *Parashas Tetzaveh*, read the week of zayin *Adar*, though – as we explained earlier – his name does not once appear explicitly in this *parashah*. The Gr”a writes that if we spell out the letters of *Moshe*’s name (מ”מ שי”ן ה”א), we see that the “inside” four letters form an interesting *gematria*. א + נ + י + מ = 40 + 10 +50 + 1 = 101, which is equal to the number of *pessukim* in *Parashas Tetzaveh*. On the 7th of *Adar*, the external aspect of *Moshe* – his body – is gone, yet the spiritual aspect of him, as hinted by the “inner” letters of his name, permeates every single *passuk* of the *parashah* which details the mishkan. R’ Beinish Ginsburg learns from here the message that “a person’s *ruchniyus* accomplishments live on even after he dies physically.”

The seventh of *Adar*, the birthday and *yahrtzeit* of *Moshe Rebbeinu*, is a day replete with meaning and opportunities for growth. Some messages we can take from this day are faith in dark times that there will be a salvation, the exactitude of Divine judgement, the *middos* of *tzniyus* and *anavah* in order to be *mevatel* oneself to *Hashem*, and the beautiful *remez* from the Gr”a that spiritual accomplishments live on. This final point is eminently demonstrated by those of us who will learn the *Torah* that *Moshe* transmitted to us and keep its *mitzvos* on *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s birthday and *yahrtzeit*, zayin *Adar*, and every other day of the year, forever. (Based on the Book of Our Heritage, R’ Beinish Ginsburg’s Ohr LeNesivasi on Shemos, and a *shiur* by Mrs. Devorah Steiglitz, heard on torahanytime.com)

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**The Pursuit of Happiness**

By Rebecca Melka

*Chazal* state about this time of year, “*mishenichnas Adar marbim besimchah*;” as we enter the month of *Adar*, we experience an increase in happiness. This is a joyous month in which our spirits lighten, reaching the climax with the celebration of *Purim*. The Slonimer Rebbe in his *sefer* Nesivos Shalom discusses the power of this *simchah*, writing that it is one of the most essential traits to possess, since it encompasses all other *middos* as well. However, the *middah* of *simchah* does not come naturally, and to perfect it requires work. Through the story of *Purim*, the Slonimer Rebbe gives us insight as to how we acquire this quality of happiness. *Mordechai* teaches us, through his courage in the face of adversity, and his faith in *Hashem*, that happiness is fostered by turning to *Hashem* and relying on Him alone for salvation.

The *Purim* story begins when *Mordechai* refuses to bow down to *Haman*. This provokes *Haman*’s anger and leads him to plan the annihilation of the Jews. While *Mordechai*’s actions may have been of noble intent, if a deed such as refusing to bow will cause this extreme response of plotting to destroy the Jewish people, how does *Mordechai* have the right to endanger the existence of the Jews?

The Nesivos Shalom gives us a new perspective through which to view *Mordechai*’s actions. *Mordechai* was not simply being obstinate or
attempting to incite Haman when he refused to bow down. Rather, he was acting with absolute "bitachon, trust in Hashem. Mordechai knew with complete clarity that only Hashem has the power to promulgate a harsh decree against the Jewish people. A rasha does not have the ability to place any decree upon a tzaddik without Hashem’s approval. Mordechai therefore understood that Hashem is the One Who had already decreed destruction upon the Jewish people. Mordechai simultaneously recognized he was capable of reversing the decree if he possessed unfaltering "bitachon in the fact that Hashem could change the fate of the Jews.

This idea is supported in the words of the megillah. It is not written about Mordechai that he “had not bowed down to Haman” - “lo karah”. Rather, it is written in the future tense that he “continuously refused to bow” - “lo yichrah.” This means that he refused to give in to the fate that was preordained for the Jewish people. Mordechai was standing up for his people and fighting on their behalf. By doing so, he created a scenario in which Hashem annulled His original harsh decree and, instead, saved the Jewish people. Mordechai’s "bitachon" caused the miracle of Purim.

Mordechai was living the essence of "bitachon through his obstinacy in acting as an advocate of the Jews. The source of this "bitachon is seen in the first of the aseres hadibros, “Anochi Hashem Elokecha,” “I am Hashem your G-d.” This statement relates two ideas about the nature of Hashem. It reveals that Hashem created the world and is continuously involved in world events. Additionally, it communicates a more personal message, applicable not only to the world as a whole but to every individual as well. The dibrah is written addressing the singular “you” – I am your G-d, Hashem is the G-d of every Jew.

A Jew is obligated to believe that he is part of the chosen nation about whom it is stated, “banim atem la-Hashem Elokeichem”. We are the children of Hashem. Just as a parent has unconditional love for a child no matter what situation the child places himself in, so, too, Hashem has endless love for the Jewish people and dwells amongst them regardless of the level of impurity to which they may descend. Each Jew has a holy neshamah that is forever present within him, as far as he may fall.

We see this idea applied to the Jews in Mitzrayim. Chazal tell us they reached the forty-ninth level of tumah, yet it is at that moment that Hashem calls them “beni bechori Yisrael,” His firstborn child. The connection Hashem has with us is eternal and unlimited. This knowledge is the root of "bitachon; it shows a person that he can and should trust that Hashem is with him in all situations. "Bitachon is so great that it can cause a change of events when a person truly believes that Hashem runs the world and never gives up on him.

Channukah and Purim were the last mo’adim established by Chazal before the Jews entered galus. Chazal saw that Bnei Yisrael were about to enter a long and dark exile and foresaw the multitude of hardships and bloodshed that would take place. They sought to strengthen the Jews throughout this galus. Therefore, they instituted Channukah and Purim – the miracles of which happened as a result of the immense "bitachon of a few Jews – to remind Klal Yisrael, “banim atem la-Hashem.” No matter what situation we are in, everything that happens to us is for the best, and, through the power of "bitachon, we are able to withstand and endure this long galus.

This is the meaning of “mishenichnas Adar marbim besimchah.” When a Jew recognizes that everything that happens is for the best, he can then come to be happy with his lot.

- Rebecca Melka
The Power of Purim

By Elisheva Hay

Purim sameach! Soon we will celebrate the holiday of venahafoch hu, the holiday of redemption and teshuvah, where everything is reversed for the good.

But how exactly did this reversal come about? How did the Jews go from one of the lowest points in their history to a miraculous geulah, from being sentenced to die at the hands of their enemies to being triumphant over them? Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein quotes R’ Shimshon Pincus, who explains the power of the teshuvah that Klal Yisrael did on Purim.

Historically, the Jews had reached a new and terrible low point in their history. G-d Himself had written us off, had signed a gezeirah for the death of every single Jew, man, woman and child.

Then, Mordechai, the leader of Klal Yisrael, saw the gezeirah in Shamayim through ruach hakodesh and publicly ripped his clothing in mourning. He saw that if G-d Himself had abandoned us and sentenced us to death, it was over for the Jewish people. Now, Klal Yisrael was without G-d and without a leader.

Their last hope was for Queen Esther to intervene on behalf of Klal Yisrael to reverse the decree. Soon the news got out that, far from appearing to help the Jews, Esther had personally invited Achashverosh and Haman to a private party.

At that point, Klal Yisrael felt that they had no one at all to help them. They didn’t have G-d on their side, they didn’t have a leader, and they didn’t have a political figure who they thought would intervene on their behalf. What Klal Yisrael did have was every reason to just give up on G-d, and to give up on Torah and mitzvos.

Utterly abandoned, sentenced to death, and without much hope of any salvation or geulah, Klal Yisrael decided to do teshuvah. Instead of turning their backs on Hashem, they redoubled their commitment to the very One who had sentenced them to death. Klal Yisrael fasted for three consecutive days. In fact, they fasted even through the seder night of Pesach, in order to send a message to Hashem.

On Purim, we showed Hashem that even if He pushes us away, even if He signs our death warrant, that we continue to love Him and would never abandon Him.

As the text of the Megillah tells us, ‘קימו ויקבלו היהודים עליהם – ‘the Jews confirmed and undertook upon themselves;’ Klal Yisrael as a nation did teshuvah, and not only were we saved, but G-d made us triumph over our enemies.

It was this extraordinary display of Klal Yisrael’s complete love and devotion to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, no matter what, that brought us from gezeirah to geulah. May we be zoche to see the ultimate geulah bemheirah beyameinu.

(Based on a shiur by R’ Zechariah Wallerstein, “What Does Love Have to Do With it?”, on TorahAnytime.com)