



Tzav – The Post Purim Message

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*“Rava said: “An individual is required to become fragrant (intoxicated) on Purim until he cannot differentiate between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai.” Rabbah and Rabbi Zeirah conducted their Purim meal together. They became intoxicated. Rabbah got up and killed Rabbi Zeirah. The next day, Rabbah realized what he had done and prayed for Divine compassion and Rabbi Zeirah was brought back to life. The following year, Rabbah said to Rabbi Zeirah, “Let us make the Purim seudah together.” Rabbi Zeirah responded, “Miracles don’t occur at all times (Talmud, Megillah 7b).”*

This “obligation” seems somewhat out of character with normative, Jewish practice. We are a religion of moderation, a people who strive to find the “middle path;” yet, the great sage Rava explains that we are required to drink on Purim until I can no longer differentiate between “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordechai.” This question is compounded by the fact that the Talmud quotes a story of great rabbis who adhered to Rava’s ruling with tragic consequences. How are we to understand this obligation to drink on Purim?

It is important to note that some of the Talmudic commentaries (Rabbeinu Nissim, Rabbeinu Ephraim) understand that Rava’s statement is not accepted as law. They derive this approach from the fact that right after Rava says there is an obligation to drink on Purim, the Gemara quotes the story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeirah. What is the purpose of this story? According to some the message is – don’t follow Rava’s advice. Other commentaries take a compromise position and explain that on Purim one should simply drink a bit more than usual. The Shulchan Aruch states, *“Echad ha’marbeh v’echad ha’mamit, u’bilvad she’yichaveyn libo la’shamayim, whether you drink a lot or a little, make sure your heart is directed to the heavens.”* If one is going to drink on Purim it must allow for spiritual elevation and cannot be the cause for the spiritual or social downfall of the individual.

The Chochmas Manoch (Rav Manoach ben Shemarya, died in 1611) provides a beautiful and powerful explanation. We all have people we don’t get along with. Sometimes, we even have enemies. There are two different types of “enemies” in life. There are individuals who have hurt me, either by taking advantage, exploiting my weaknesses or betraying my trust. These are the Hamans of life. Then there are others who have not hurt or harmed me in any way. They have never said or done anything disdainful or harmful. But they have more than me, are more accomplished than me and are more successful that I can hope to become. I don’t like them because I am jealous of them. These are the Mordechais of life. The Megillah ends with the phrase that Mordechai was beloved by *“rov echav, the majority of his brethren.”* You may ask how could it be that Mordechai who was one of the architects of the Purim salvation would only be beloved by the “majority” of the Jews? Is it possible to imagine that there were people who didn’t like Mordechai? And of course the answer is – yes. The Ibn Ezra explains that there were some who didn’t like Mordechai simply because he had and was more. Some significant minority of our ancestors did not like the man who was ready to give his life for his people – simply because he was more successful. Many of us have our Mordechais – the people we don’t “like” because they have what we perceive we lack.

The Chochmas Manoch explains that our job on Purim is to reconcile with our Hamans and Mordechais. Our job is to try to make peace within the ranks of our holy nation. But sometimes it is difficult to reconcile with people who you feel separate and estranged from. This is beauty of Rava’s statement.

Rava teaches us that we should drink until we don’t know the difference between *“Arur Haman, Cursed is Haman”* and *“Baruch Mordechai, Blessed is Mordechai;”* we should use a glass of wine and a celebratory meal to come closer to one another. Sometimes, a little l’chaim, sharing some “mezonos” has the ability to break down walls that have stood for a long time. Sometimes, with a little bit of wine, a person feels the confidence to approach another and settle old differences. Rava is not necessarily teaching us to get drunk – he is teaching us how to reconcile and strengthen our people. We all have our Hamans and our Mordechais, Purim is the day to transform these individuals into my brethren.

Although the Yom Tov of Purim is behind us – this message still resonates strongly. As we now begin to eagerly anticipate and prepare for the Yom Tov of Pesach; the Yom Tov in which we celebrate the creation of our Nation and beginning of our national narrative. Let us accept upon ourselves to be good to one another, kind to one another and do what is within our power to embrace and accept the Hamans and Mordechais of life.