

PARSHAT KI TISA

9 - 15 Adar 5785
9 - 15 March 2025

Torah: Exodus 30:11 - 34:35
HafTorah: Kings I 18:20-39

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Positive Mitzvah 209 Respecting the Sages

We are commanded to accord respect to Torah scholars and respectfully rise for them. Although everyone is required to respect sages (even one Torah scholar must respect another of equal stature), this Mitzvah is compounded with regard to the respect a student is expected to have for his teacher.

A student is required to respect and revere his teacher, he is forbidden to challenge his teachings, and always must give him the benefit of the doubt.

"LOTS OF LUCK"

My favorite lottery story is about the family who discovered that their elderly father had picked the winning number and won multi-millions! But the old man had a weak heart, and his kids were worried that with his condition, the news may give him a heart attack. So, they asked his cardiologist to break the news gently and be on hand in case the excitement affected his heart.

The doctor agreed and went to see his patient. He started the conversation rather harmlessly: "Hey Sam, what would you say if I told you that you had won the lottery?"

Sam answered, "Hey doc, if I won the lottery, I'd give you half!"

The doctor dropped dead on the spot of a heart attack.

The word Purim means "lots." Haman put 12 slips of paper into his hat and drew lots to determine in which Hebrew month to kill the Jews. The lot fell on the month of Adar.

Now, a little knowledge is dangerous, you know, and Haman knew that Moses had died in Adar and saw that as a good omen for his plot's success. What He did not realize, however, was that Moses was also born in Adar, and it was, in fact, not a good omen for him at all.

If I was looking to name this holiday, I don't think I would have chosen the name Purim - Lots. It's rather dull and unimaginative. Imagine Steven Spielberg made a movie of the Purim story - and it is indeed worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster - what do you think he would call it? Definitely not "Lots."

There is, however, a deep meaning behind the Sages' choice of this name.

Haman viewed life as one big lottery. It's all the luck of the draw, the roll of the dice, a spin of the wheel, or a flip of the coin. Heads you win, tails you lose. Heads you live, tails you die. Haman believed that everything is random. He denied the concept of Divine Providence, that G-d is the Master of the Universe and runs the world.

And to that, we, the Jewish people, say a defiant "No!" Life is not random! Life is meaningful and purposeful and how we live our lives

is reflected by how G-d deals with us. We are not dependent on nature or logic; we live by the miraculous.

Logically, we shouldn't even exist.

For us Jews, miracles are the norm. That's how we survived until now and that's how we continue to survive today. Jewish survival and Jewish life defy the very laws of nature.

And that brings us back to the story of Purim.

Logically, it made no sense whatsoever for the Jews of Persia to be threatened with genocide. In Persia, a relatively enlightened society, the Jews were granted freedom and civil rights. They were even invited to the king's party. And suddenly, they were facing the threat of total annihilation? It made no sense at all. It came out of the blue. But while it was not logical, it was not random either.

You see, they went to the king's party, the mother of all parties that lasted not a day, not a week, not a month, but 6 months! "180 days," says the Megillah. And while there are different opinions as to whether they ate non-kosher food or not, it was still an act of Jewish shame, debasement, and humiliation. At that party, King Achashverosh displayed the sacred vessels of our Holy Temple that Queen Vashti's grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, had looted when he destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem. Can you just imagine... our holy golden Menorah being used as a prop? As décor for this wild, drunken party? What a disgrace to Jewish self-respect, to Jewish pride and principle.

And because of that loss of our own self-respect, Haman's decree of genocide was sanctioned by G-d.

It wasn't until we repented and changed our ways that we were saved by a miracle through the brave efforts of Queen Esther and her cousin Mordechai.

Now let's have a look at the solution. It came through the intervention of the courageous Queen Esther, arguably the greatest Jewish heroine in all of history.

What did Esther do? She went to see the king. Uninvited. Unannounced. She took her life in her hands, because if the king wasn't happy to see her, it could have easily been off with her head, just like Vashti. Indeed, Esther was afraid; she hadn't been

summoned to see him for a whole month.

So, before she went, she asked Mordechai to have all the Jews fast and pray for her success. She, too, fasted for three days before approaching King Achashverosh.

Logically, fasting was the very last thing Esther should have done! Surely, she should've tried to look her very best and make a favorable impression with the drunken, degenerate despot.

But no. What does Esther do? She fasts and prays to G-d. She fasts for three days! You know what you look like after one Yom Kippur? Can you imagine what you look like after three Yom Kippurs?!

The Jewish people, too, took the least logical path. Did you know that according to commentary they could have saved their lives by giving up their faith?

But no. For the entire year that Haman's decree was in place, not one Jew gave up his or her faith. Not one! The bottom line? Jews are not normal. No, we're not meshuga. But we play by different rules. We are not a nation like other nations. Our existence and survival are determined not by the lottery, political science, diplomatic initiatives, or the normal laws of nature, but by G-d Almighty and His infinite Divine Providence. When we daven, when Esther fasts, when we return to G-d with all our hearts, then miracles happen.

And Esther understood this. That's why she didn't do all the things a normal woman would have done to make an impression on the King. She knew she had to make an impression not on King Achashverosh, but on the King of Kings, G-d Almighty.

So, no, life is not the luck of the draw, or the roll of the dice. Life is not random. We didn't survive millennia of adversities by good fortune or coincidence, nor by being clever and resourceful. Life is meaningful and purposeful and Jewish life must be authentically Jewish. Only then, do we merit the Divine Providence and heavenly protection that despite all odds, no matter the circumstances, we will prevail and still be here to tell the tale.

May we continue to experience the miracle of Jewish survival until the

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THE PURIM STORY IN A NUTSHELL

The Persian Empire of the 4th century BCE extended over 127 lands, and all the Jews were its subjects. When King Achashverosh had his wife, Queen Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders, he arranged a beauty pageant to find a new queen. A Jewish girl, Esther, found favor in his eyes and became the new queen, though she refused to divulge her nationality.

Meanwhile, the Jew-hating Haman was appointed prime minister of the empire. Mordechai, the leader of the Jews (and Esther's cousin), defied the king's orders and refused to bow to Haman. Haman was incensed, and he convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all the Jews on the 13th of Adar, a date chosen by a lottery Haman made ("Purim" being the Persian word for "lottery" plural).

Mordechai galvanized all the Jews, convincing them to repent, fast and pray to G-d. Meanwhile, Esther asked the king and Haman to join her for a feast. At a subsequent feast, Esther revealed to the king her Jewish identity. Haman was hanged, Mordechai was appointed prime minister in his stead, and a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies.

On the 13th of Adar, the Jews mobilized and killed many of their enemies. On the 14th of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the capital city of Shushan (current-day Iran), they took one more day to finish the job.

KI TISA IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Ki Tisa," means "When you take" and it is found in Exodus 30:11. The people of Israel are told to each contribute exactly half a shekel of silver to the Sanctuary. Instructions are also given regarding the making of the Sanctuary's water basin, anointing oil and incense. "Wise-hearted" artisans Betzalel and Aholiav are placed in charge of the Sanctuary's construction, and the people are once again commanded to keep the Shabbat.

When Moses does not return when expected from Mount Sinai, the people make a golden calf and worship it. G-d proposes to destroy the errant nation, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. Moses descends from the mountain carrying the tablets of the testimony engraved with the Ten Commandments; seeing the people dancing about their idol, he breaks the tablets, destroys the golden calf, and has the primary culprits put to death. He then returns to G-d to say: "If You do not forgive them, blot me out from the book that You have written."

G-d forgives, but says that the effect of their sin will be felt for many generations. At first G-d proposes to send His angel along with them, but Moses insists that G-d Himself accompany His people to the promised land.

Moses prepares a new set of tablets and once more ascends the mountain, where G-d reinscribes the covenant on these second tablets. On the mountain, Moses is also granted a vision of the divine thirteen attributes of mercy. So radiant is Moses' face upon his return, that he must cover it with a veil, which he removes only to speak with G-d and to teach His laws to the people.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 9 Adar 5785 - 9 March 2025

Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe arrives in America (1940)

After a 12-day sea voyage, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (5640-5700, or 1880-1950), disembarked at the New York harbor on the 9th of Adar II 5700 (1940), following his miraculous rescue from Nazi-occupied Warsaw.

Tuesday, 11 Adar 5785 - 11 March 2025

First Print of Rashi (1475)

Rashi, the preeminent commentary on the Torah, was printed for the first time on this day, in Reggio di Calabria, Italy.

Passing of Rogatchover (1936)

Rabbi Yosef Rosen, known as the Rogatchover Gaon (Prodigy/Genius), passed away in Vienna on Thursday, 11 Adar 5696 (1936).

Rabbi Rosen, born in 5618 (1858), and raised in the Belarusian city of Rogatchov, served for decades as a rabbi in the Latvian city of Dvinsk (Daugavpils). He was an unparalleled genius, whose in depth understanding of all Talmudic literature left the greatest of scholars awestruck. He habitually demonstrated that many of the famous debates between the Talmudic sages have a singular thread and theme.

Rabbi Rosen authored tens of thousands of responsa on the Talmud and Jewish law. Many of them have been compiled in the series Tzafnat Paneach.

Passing of the "Chida" (1806)

Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, popularly known as the Chida, an acronym of his four names, was a master Talmudist, Kabbalist, decisor of Halachah, historian, bibliophile and traveler, who raised funds on behalf of the Jews of the Holy Land. His prolific writings cover virtually every area of Jewish tradition, history, and belief. Born in 5484 (1724) in Jerusalem, he studied under the greatest Sepharadic sages in the holy city, which teachings heavily

influenced his prolific writings. His chronicles of his travels offer invaluable insights into Jewish life of his times, and his Torah teachings are studied until this day. Toward the end of his life, he settled in Livorno, Italy, where he passed away in 5566 (1806).

Wednesday, 12 Adar 5785 - 12 March 2025

Herod's Temple Dedicated (11 BCE)

After 334 years, the 2nd Holy Temple in Jerusalem was in disrepair. In the year 3741 (19 BCE), King Herod I floated the idea of rebuilding and renovating the Temple. Though many Jews were wary of Herod's motives, the renovation was completed eight years later. The new structure was magnificent, causing the Talmud to state: "He who has not seen Herod's edifice has never seen a magnificent edifice!"

Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires Bombed (1992)

On the afternoon of 12 Adar II 5752 (1992), a pickup truck loaded with explosives smashed into the front of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina and detonated. The embassy, a church, and a school were destroyed. The blast killed 29 and wounded 242.

Thursday, 13 Adar 5785 - 13 March 2025

War Against Persian Jew-haters (356 BCE)

On the 13th of Adar 3405 (356 BCE), battles were fought throughout the Persian Empire between the Jews and those seeking to kill them, in accordance with the decree issued by King Achashverosh 11 months earlier. (Achashverosh never rescinded that decree; but after the hanging of Haman on Nissan 16 of the previous year, and Queen Esther's pleading on behalf of her people, he agreed to issue a second decree authorizing the Jews to defend themselves against those seeking to kill them.) 75,000 enemies were killed on that day, and 500 in the capital, Shushan, including Haman's ten sons, whose bodies were subsequently hanged. The Jews did not take any of the possessions of the slain as booty, though authorized to do so by the king's decree.

Maccabee Victory (135 BCE)

On this day in 3625 (135 BCE), the Maccabees defeated the Syrian General Nicanor in a battle fought four years after the Maccabee's liberation of the Holy Land and the miracle of Chanukah.

Passing of Rabbi Yehudah the Pious (1217)

Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid - the pious - was held in high esteem for his piety and saintliness. He authored Sefer Chassidim, a collection of ethical and halachic teachings that is widely studied to this day. The Kabbalistic instructions included in his so-called "testament" are accepted and practiced in many communities.

Passing of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1986)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was one of the major leaders of American Jewry in the 20th century. Born in 5655 (1895), he came to New York in 5696 (1936) in order to escape the oppressive Soviet regime.

In addition to the students in the Yeshivah he headed, he guided rabbis and lay people with his insightful and definitive responsa on virtually every area of Jewish law. Many of them have been collected in the multi-volume Igrot Moshe.

He passed away on 13 Adar II 5746 (1986).

Friday, 14 Adar 5785 - 14 March 2025

Purim Victory Celebrated (356 BCE)

The festival of Purim celebrates the salvation, in 3404 (356 BCE), of the Jewish people from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day."

Shabbat, 15 Adar 5785 - 15 March 2025

Purim Victory Celebrated in Shushan (356 BCE)

The battles fought between the Jews and their enemies, which took place on Adar 13 throughout the Persian empire, continued for two days - Adar 13 and 14 - in the capital city of Shushan, where there were a greater number of Jew haters. Thus, the victory celebrations in Shushan were held on the 15th of Adar, and the observance of the festival of Purim was instituted for that day in Shushan and all walled cities.