**A Primer on Religious Intoxication**Adam Friedmann – afriedmann@torontotorah.com

Fast of Esther

1. **Esther 9:30-31**

(ל) וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל הַיְּהוּדִים אֶל שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה מַלְכוּת אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ דִּבְרֵי שָׁלוֹם וֶאֱמֶת: (לא) לְקַיֵּם אֶת יְמֵי הַפֻּרִים הָאֵלֶּה בִּזְמַנֵּיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר קִיַּם עֲלֵיהֶם מָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי וְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְכַאֲשֶׁר קִיְּמוּ עַל נַפְשָׁם וְעַל זַרְעָם דִּבְרֵי הַצֹּמוֹת וְזַעֲקָתָם:

**30** Dispatches were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahasuerus with an ordinance of “equity and honesty:” **31** These days of Purim shall be observed at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew—and now Queen Esther—has obligated them to do, and just as they have assumed for themselves and their descendants the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations.

1. **Rambam, Laws of Fasts 5:5**

ונהגו כל ישראל בזמנים אלו להתענות בשלשה עשר באדר זכר לתענית שהתענו בימי המן שנאמר +אסתר ט'+ דברי הצומות וזעקתם

And the entire Jewish people follow the custom of fasting at these times and on the Thirteenth of Adar, in commemoration of the fasts that [the people] took upon themselves in the time of Haman, as mentioned [in Esther 9:31]: "the matter of the fasts and the outcries."

1. **Esther 9**

(יז) בְּיוֹם שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְעָשֹׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה: (יח) והיהודיים וְהַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשָׁן נִקְהֲלוּ בִּשְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וּבְאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְנוֹחַ בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְעָשֹׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתֶּה וְשִׂמְחָה:

**17** That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking. **18** But the Jews in Shushan mustered on both the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and so rested on the fifteenth, and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.

1. **Sheiltot of R Ahai Gaon, Vayakhel 67**

אבל תענית בין כרכים בין כפרים בין עיירות כולן מתענין בשלשה עשר באדר דאמר שמואל בר רב יצחק שלשה עשר זמן קהילה לכל היא …מאי קהילה יום תענית

But the fast both in the walled cities and in the farms, and unwalled cities, everyone fasts on the 13th of Adar because R Shmuel b R Yitzchak said – the 13th is a time of ‘gathering’ for everyone…What is ‘gathering’? A day of fasting.

Reading the Megillah – Hallel?

1. **Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 17a**

אי הכי הלל נמי נימא! - לפי שאין אומרים הלל על נס שבחוצה לארץ. …רב נחמן אמר: קרייתא זו הלילא

**If so,** **let us also recite *hallel*** on Purim. *Hallel* is not said on Purim, **because *hallel* is not recited on a miracle** that occurred **outside Eretz** Yisrael...**Rav Naḥman said**: **The reading of** the Megilla itself **is** an act of reciting ***hallel*.**

1. **Commentary of the Vilna Gaon to Esther 1:2**

It (the Megillah) wrote this to show the greatness of G-d who set chains of events into motion to cause a miracle for Israel. Because Mordechai was already in Shushan as it states “a man of Yehudah was in Shushan.” That is to say, he was already there, and G-d caused and led Achashverosh to settle there. Therefore they (i.e. the Sages) said that we must read all of it. Because presumably [one may ask] why do we need to know about the might of Achashverosh? But [the answer is] that in each and every *pasuk* the Megillah relates the greatness of the miracle. But the miracle occurred with “a hidden face”, that is to say that He caused it to occur through nature, not like [the miracle] in Egypt which occurred with a strong hand and outstretched arm

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1. **Yemei haPurim, R Dovid Cohen**

That is to say, that the entire process of enunciating Hallel on Purim occurs through reading the Megillah, and not through the recital of Hallel. The basis for this: We have explained that it is not appropriate to say Hallel on actions of G-d which are concealed within natural law. [Therefore,] the only reason for reciting Hallel over the redemption of Purim is that through connecting all the events [of the story together] it becomes clear and revealed that this redemption was impossible except through the strength of His great name which is the guiding force that is beyond the forces of nature. We find [therefore,] that there is no basis for reciting Hallel, except by way of reading the Megillah.

Physical or Spiritual Intoxication?

1. **Shulchan Aruch, 695:2**

חייב אינש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי. הגה: וי"א דא"צ להשתכר כל כך, אלא שישתה יותר מלימודו (כל בו) וישן, ומתוך שישן אינו יודע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי. (מהרי"ל). ואחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט, ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים.

One is obligated to be intoxicated on Purim to the point where he does not know [the difference] between "accursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai". Rama: Some say it is not necessary to become drunk so much, but rather to drink more than he is used to (Kol Bo), and to fall asleep, and while he sleeps he does not know [the difference] between "accursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai" (Maharil). [There is no difference] between one who has more and one who has less, as long as his heart is directed to heaven.

1. **Turei Zahav, Orach Chayim 695:1**

חייב אינש לבסומי כו'. - רבים רוצים לתרץ ולפרש מה הכוונה בזה ולא נתיישב ולעד"נ לפרש בדרך זה דצריך האדם לתת שבח לו ית' על טובה כפולה שעשה עמנו הא' הוא פורענות שהביא הוא ית' על המן ואלו לא נתברך מרדכי אלא היה ניצול עם כל ישראל דיינו אלא שבירכו למרדכי בגדולה מאוד והטובה יתירה ע"כ אמר צריך לבסומי עד שלא ידע מעלתינו מן ארור המן שזה מפל' שלו לברוך מרדכי שזה מעלתינו שני' והכוונ' מדאמר עד דלא ידע מכלל שקודם שכרות שלו ידע ונתן שבח ע"ז בזה נתכוונו שלא יפסיק מליתן שבח ע"ז בשמח' עד שיבו' לידי כך שלא יבחין עוד ואז פטור מזה כנלע"ד:

A person must become intoxicated – many have wanted to respond and explain the intention in this and has not been settled. And in my humble opinion it is explained as follows: a person must give praise to G-d on the double goodness which He did for us. First is the punishment which He brought to Haman. And even if Mordechai had not been blessed but was just saved with all of Israel it would have been enough for us. But He even blessed Mordechai with greatness and exceeding goodness. Therefore it says that we must become intoxicated until we can’t distinguish between our uplifting through “the curse of Haman”, that is to say, his downfall, and “the blessing of Mordechai” which is our second uplifting. And the intention in their saying “until he does not know” since before his intoxication he knew and gave praise about these (i.e. “the curse of Haman and the blessing of Mordechai”), their intention was that he should not stop giving praise for these with joy until he reaches the point where he cannot discern between the m and then he is relieved of his duty.