

# *Purim Light*

"The Jews had light, happiness, joy, and honor." (Ester 8:16)

"Light is Torah" (Talmud Meggila 16b)

## Adar – It's more than just a name

Rav Asher

"Hashem is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere..." (other than in the Megilla).

This is one of the most commonly asked questions, why isn't Hashem mentioned, at all?

Much has been written about this, so here's one more idea which might enlighten the meaning of the name Adar אדר.

There are two words in Hebrew used to describe living/dwelling.

One is גר

like one who lives in the Bahamas would say: I גר in the Bahamas. I live in the Bahamas.

When Yaakov's family of 70 came down to Egypt due to the famine in Israel (and of course due to the fact that their sibling/son Yosef was second in command) Pharaoh asks them why have they moved to Egypt. They respond:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-פַּרְעֹה, לָגוּר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, כִּי-אֵין מְרֻעָה לְצֹאן אֲשֶׁר לַעֲבָדֶיךָ, כִּי-כִבֵּד הָרַעַב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן; וְעַתָּה יֵשְׁבוּ-נָא עַבְדֶּיךָ, בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן.

“And they said to Pharaoh, we have come to live in the land, because there is no grazing land for your servants (themselves), since the famine in the land of Cna'an is heavy, and now please let your servants sit in the land of Goshen” (Bereshit 47:4)

The word in Hebrew used to describe their desire to live in Egypt in the beginning of the passuk is לגור.

As we see from the rest of the passuk their plan was to just temporarily live in Egypt until the famine passed over Cna'an. It was not supposed to be a permanent move, as it indeed turned out to be.

Similar to how many Israelis go to the States for “just a few years” לגור, to make some bucks, planning on returning, but often end up staying.

The root of the word לגור is גור, which also gives us the word גר - a foreigner, one who is not totally settled and comfortable with their surroundings, one who always sticks out and has a special status.

גר "Ger," also means convert, which as we know is somebody who was not born Jewish and wasn't “at home” with Judaism for a part of their life. Even after their conversion, while we hope they'll feel at home as much as possible, there're still a few special laws that only pertain to a convert, such as being extra sensitive to them and showing them more compassion and love, specific marriage laws, and so on.

Bottom line is, the word גר has the connotation of temporariness and of out of the ordinary/exception.

On the other hand the word דר has much more of a permanent connotation to it.

For example, an apartment is called a דירה.

Now let me ask you, am I a stranger in my own home??? Obviously not. So if you were to enter my home, it's not unusual to find me there, it's the most natural thing in the world. Now if you'd relate and mention to someone how you were in my home the other day, you probably would bring up all the special and unique facts about it, such as the people you met there, or

events which unraveled. You probably wouldn't take too much time to explain how I was there, and what I was doing there, and so on. It's my home! Not much explanation needed.

On the other hand, in someone else's home, I do stick out, and finding me there requires some mention and clarification.

In an attempt to explain the creation of the world there's a famous saying<sup>1</sup>, which says:

נתאוה הקב"ה להיות לו יתברך **דירה** בתחתונים

Hashem yearned for a "**דירה-Dira**" – a dwelling place, in the lower world(s) i.e. our world.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains<sup>2</sup> that just as a person residing in their own home resides in their true nature and in all their essence, expressions, and appearances, so too Hashem yearned for a home in the lower worlds, in which he would be able to reside in all his essence, expressions, and appearances.

We see here too that **דירה** has the connotation of a permanent dwelling place.

Keeping this mind we can try to explain what the name of the month, Adar means.<sup>3</sup>

Hashem has many names and titles. One way in which he's described, is as an א - Alef, the **אלוף של עולם**, meaning, The General/beginner of the world.

The word in Hebrew used in the IDF for a major-general is אלוף.

On a very basic level, just like the letter Alef is the first letter and the "leader" of all the other letters, so too Hashem is The "Alef" of our world.

Now of course, Hashem doesn't always seem like an "Alef," as a top priority in the world we're living in. Very often, and at best, people make him secondary, a ב "Bet." Usually, he unfortunately, becomes a kind of "Nun Sofit" (a final nun) just hanging there almost meaningless in our lives... very low on our list of priorities.

Yet **אדר** Adar, is a time when Hashem is mamesh an Alef א-דר, an Alef who is דר, living permanently amongst us! Hashem (THE "Alef") is so much at home during the Purim story, that he is not even mentioned as an unusual guest or character in the Megilla, BECAUSE he's so much at home, he's doesn't stick out, it's his "natural habitat!" There is not the story of Purim on one hand, and G-D on the other, which needs to be connected to each other. They're both one, and therefore there is no need to mention G-D!

א, THE alef, is דר, permanently dwelling in all of his essence expressions, and appearances, during Purim and the month of Adar. **א-דר!**

May we privileged to feel how much of an א-Alef Hashem is during this month, and may we always try to make him an Alef in our lives!

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<sup>1</sup> Brought down in many places, such as Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Nasso.

<sup>2</sup> Sich'a Shabbos Mishpatim Erev Rosh Chodesh Adar 1956

<sup>3</sup> Yes, it's true that this too is a name with Babylonian/Acadian idolatry origins, yet at the same time, it was given a "neshama" once the Jews brought it to Israel and "converted" it to Judaism. This neshama is what we're attempting to understand.

## It's all about the Process

Pinchas Greer

As having been a teachers assistant in a special needs school last year as well as teaching children with ADHD this year, I often find myself explaining my educational philosophies to others. One of my strongest beliefs is that children learn best through doing. It is not always about the product, but rather more about the process. This is not to say that the end result isn't important, as it usually is. It's just that as an educator, I strongly emphasize the importance of what can be learned through doing something. When you think about this, it truly makes sense. In life, things are much more meaningful when you put in the hard work to accomplish them. For example, if playing an instrument or being a dancer was easily picked up, we wouldn't appreciate the art of musicians or dancers. Losing weight wouldn't be a popular topic to discuss, whether the conversation is about weight loss strategies, workouts, varying types of exercises, or diets, if the process wasn't so important. Getting a degree in college or graduate school wouldn't be as exciting if you hadn't just spent a number of years in school working towards that degree.

It is so easy to just be good at something and to never have to work at it; but does it make you feel accomplished? What is it that truly makes our accomplishments mean something, if not the effort we put into tasks? This is not to say that the journey we take isn't often taxing or bothersome, but it is usually the more challenging tasks that are the most meaningful. This is why I believe that the process is the exciting part of getting to a product.

This idea of "process" can be applied when thinking about Megillat Esther. We sit through megilla reading twice and listen to this whole drawn out story, which could be written in a more simple and concise way. Here goes... Once upon a time (which is how every good story begins), there was a king, Achashveirosh. He had a mean wife, Vashti, whom he had killed. Now the king needed a new queen and he chose this girl, Esther, who was tight with Mordechai (relationship unclear). There was also this guy, Haman, who hated the Jews and despised Mordechai. Haman made a plan to kill the Jews, but then Esther exposed him. The Jews were saved, and everyone lived happily ever after. The end.

Good story, right? Bet that took less than a minute to read, tops. So, why is the megilla so detailed and complicated? Why are there so many commentaries that tell us details that we wouldn't know just from reading the story? Why are there books like *Let My Nation Live* by Yosef Deutsch and *The Queen You Thought You Knew* by Rabbi David Fohrman that change the way we think about the megilla and help us understand the deeper messages within it? To put it simply, it's because of the process. Obviously, everyone is happy that the Jewish people are saved in the end, and that is most definitely an important piece of the story. But now there are so many questions. Why did Achashveirosh have this big party and kill his wife? Why did Esther have to become the queen? Why did Esther hide information about her heritage? What was Mordechai and Esther's relationship? What was the reason that Mordechai overheard a plot to kill Achashveirosh? Why did Haman hate the Jewish people, and specifically hate Mordechai? Why didn't Mordechai or Esther go straight to Achashveirosh and tell him about Haman's plan?

The questions can go on for forever, but it is these questions that create a more meaningful story. It is these questions that cause one to think about the megilla differently than just reading a short story with no real message. It is the process of the entire megilla that allows us to feel truly victorious at the end of the story. If

the megilla was as short and concise as I initially told it, it wouldn't be special. It would be just another story that we'd read once, maybe twice, and never think about again.

Personally, Megillat Esther is one of my favorite seforim in Tanach, so the more I learn about the intricacies and below the surface details, the more connected I feel to it. There is meaning behind every aspect of the Purim story, including the way the holiday begins. We start Purim at the end of a fast day and read the megilla. Then, we spend the rest of that night and the next day rejoicing from the process we read about. Yes, we are celebrating that the Jewish people were saved from Haman's plan to wipe us out. But we are also celebrating the process that Esther and Mordechai went through to save the nation. The story told in the megilla could not have been easy for Esther and Mordechai. It can be assumed that they did not know G-d's ultimate plan, which caused the process they went through to be hard and difficult. Esther and Mordechai did what they needed to do to get results, and therefore, the process in Megillat Esther becomes much more valuable for us to know. It is through understanding the details of the megillah that allow us to create a meaningful connection to the holiday.

In order to see this more clearly, let's look at a couple of examples from the text. One example is when Mordechai has to convince Esther to go talk to Achashveirosh about Haman's plan to kill the Jewish people. Esther is apprehensive because Achashveirosh hasn't summoned her in a while; but what's the big deal? They're husband and wife. Married couples don't ever meet up to talk about the kids or who's going grocery shopping? Well, it is a big deal because of what Esther tells Mordechai: "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, know, that whoever, whether man or woman, shall come to the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is a law for him, that he be put to death, except such to whom, the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live; but I have not been called to the king these thirty days" (4th chapter, verse 11). Esther makes a pretty compelling argument that there is a good chance that she'll be killed if she approaches Achashveirosh without having been summoned. Mordechai responds: "Do not think in your heart that you shall escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if you hold your peace at this time, then relief and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish; and who knows where you have not come to the royal estate for such a time as this?" (4th chapter, verses 13-14).

Okay, so Esther's choices aren't too promising. Either she goes to the king's court without permission and is possibly punished by death or she stays quiet and G-d kills her and her family anyway. What kind of options are these? Esther chooses to hope for the best and approach Achashveirosh. Esther asks the Jewish people to fast and pray for her for three days before she goes to the king. This sounds like a pretty big deal. Often we need to choose between two options, but usually those options don't result in death. There really wasn't a lesser of two evils in this case. The fact that Esther comes away from her meeting with the king alive is amazing! Esther had to rely on G-d and hope that He would save her, even though she had no way to know the outcome. Would Esther's survival from this have been as special if Esther had had a standing lunch date with her husband everyday? Would it have meant as much if Esther hadn't risked her life for the lives of the hundreds or thousands of Jewish people, who would have been killed from Haman's decree? Would Esther have asked the Jewish people to fast and pray for her if she hadn't truly needed their prayers? Esther needed to go through this process, which made the fact that the king did not have her killed and that she ultimately saved the Jewish people so much more meaningful.

Another example of the idea of “process” is when Esther invites Achashveirosh and Haman to two private parties, in order for her to spill the beans of Haman’s plot to wipe out the Jewish people. Why couldn’t Esther just tell the king without this pretense of a party? Furthermore, why did there have to be two parties? Also, why couldn’t Esther have just called a meeting with the king and Haman? Yosef Deutsch, in his book 'Let My Nation Live,' gives a very interesting explanation, based on Mefarshim, for why Esther went through this whole ordeal. On one hand, by inviting Haman to this private shindig, the king might start to wonder about the relationship of Haman and Esther. Is there something going on between them? Why is Haman, an advisor, being invited to a party with the king? Were Haman and Esther plotting to overthrow him? One party was enough, but to invite Haman to two parties? Esther was planting the seed of doubt in Achashveirosh’s mind that would ultimately help her win his favor when she told him about Haman’s decree. On the other hand, Haman was elated by these invitations. Esther was clearly living by the phrase “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” Esther wanted Haman to feel a sense of false hope, so that in his comfort, he might slip up. He might say or do something that would cause Achashveirosh to be angry. Additionally, Haman’s perceived closer connection to the queen caused him, Haman, to be blindsided by Esther’s accusation of wanting to kill her and her people. If Haman had caught wind of a private meeting just between the king and queen, he might have gotten suspicious, especially since he was aware that she had a relationship with Mordechai.

Yes, it would have been easier for Esther to just tell Achashveirosh what was going on, but other issues could have arisen. Maybe Achashveirosh would have thought that Esther had a vendetta against Haman. Maybe Achashveirosh would have ignored her. It’s possible that the king could have gotten angry with Esther and had her beheaded, just like Vashti. Another variable was Haman. Esther did not trust Haman, so she wanted to keep him close by to monitor his actions. What if Haman had guessed that she was Jewish and went to the king? (Deutsch, 2002, 242-252) Once again, we see the importance of “process.”

These are just two examples that show how important process is. Just through analyzing these two parts, the Megilla seems much more meaningful. Megillat Esther is not just merely a story, but it is also full of hidden messages. It teaches us about the importance of going through a process and not just making decisions. We can see how much more special and valuable the product or result can be when the journey is thought-out and deliberate, and even more so when it is difficult.

## Shushan Purim Shmuel Gordon

Purim is a special type of holiday, much different than all the others in Judaism. Most holidays have a Shabbat mentality, with all of the melachot in place, long Tefilot, with a serious feel to the day. Purim however is different for a few reasons. The obvious differences of hearing the Megillah, drinking, and the mitzvot of giving gifts to friends and the poor, there is one aspect of Purim which we find only attached to this holiday- Shushan Purim.

At first glance, the halachot of Purim and Shushan Purim don't make sense. Why would you celebrate the holiday on different days depending on what city you live in? Why isn't there one day established as Purim for everyone like there is by every other holiday?

The simple answer is that we find it this way at the time of when the miracle of Purim took place. In all the cities, the battle took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, while they rested and celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup>. However in Shushan, they had an extra day of battle (the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>) and then rested and celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Although Shushan Purim is celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> like in Shushan because this is the place where the miracle happened, the Rabbis also established that we celebrate it on the 15<sup>th</sup> in Jerusalem, the holiest city, in order to give honor to the day. All other cities that had walls surrounding them in the times of Yehoshua Ben Nun are given the status of Shushan and celebrate on the 15<sup>th</sup> also, but nowadays Jerusalem is (basically) the only city that follows Shushan Purim. Even though there are cities outside of Israel that have been surrounded by walls since the times of Yehoshua, since they were not important in those days, Purim is only celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

A different answer can also be suggested. At first glance, Purim appears to be the most physical holiday. It's a mitzvah to eat a feast, get drunk, and dress up, while most other holidays the main idea is spiritual (davening, shofar, learning, etc.). If you look at it deeper, Purim is more than just a party to eat and drink and have fun. Everything we do on Purim is because it's a mitzvah and we are able to elevate everyday things like eating and drinking, and make it holy by using it to serve Hashem and celebrate our salvation against our enemies.

Therefore, Shushan Purim isn't just another day to have fun, it's another day to celebrate and thank Hashem for saving us. By establishing this day for a walled city that has been around since the times of Yehoshua, we are strengthening our point. Despite all the hardships the Jews have been through over the years, Hashem will never forsake his people.

In the times of Purim, we were not worthy of being saved, but Hashem decided to save us anyway. Therefore we celebrate by doing physical things to show that just like when you are drunk, you are not in control of your actions, so too in the times of Purim, even though we didn't do enough to try to save ourselves and we weren't worthy, Hashem still helped us.

Shushan Purim isn't just a different day to celebrate, it's another day to elevate the physical in our lives, and show that Hashem is always in charge and will protect us. When we celebrate in Jerusalem, which is a walled city and has been around since the times of Yehoshua we are celebrating a lot more than just Purim. Even though Jerusalem hasn't always been in Jewish hands and the Jews have been through many hard times there, it is still the holiest city and Hashem won't forget his city and his people.

## Getting Drunk

Yosef Prigal

There is a common idea brought down by many, (such as the רמב"ל, and others) that the Jewish year spirals. Every month, every day, etc. we have immense potential to grow or descend spiritually.

Each year as we approach Purim's part of the spiral we must question ourselves. Have we grown from the previous פורים, or have we fallen? On פורים it is common practice to drink until the difference between Mordechai and Haman is no longer distinguishable - עד דלא ידע (Shulchan Aruch Siman 695:2).

As I approach this year's פורים I must ask myself, what possible growth could come from such craziness? It's simple to see how easily we can fall every פורים when we give control of our minds to our more primal side, and take a break from the rigorous control our intellect holds us in. However, I don't believe that the purpose of drinking on פורים is to simply lose control. I believe, that drinking on פורים gives us a set time in our busy year/schedule to take a step back and look through a "new set of eyes", un-blinded by our own intellect. Through these "new eyes" we can modify the conclusions we may have come to about ourselves, others, and even the world as a whole.

But why wine? Why not simply have פורים as a day of quiet self reflection? Obviously we already have many answers to "why wine?" Probably the most famous of those being that the miracle of פורים came through the wine. Still, I ask, why does alcohol play such a big role in the celebration of the פורים story?

I think ה' is sending us a message. The message that a quiet פורים of self reflection is not enough. You must get drunk to the point that you start to see the world differently and only then can you come to the realization of the message ה' has hidden in the world.

We are not in control. Yet we may as well be drunk our entire lives as we walk around believing that we are in control. When we are drunk on פורים, finally we see that we truly are not in control, (for some of us) not even of our thoughts or actions. Eventually we must come to terms with the fact that ה' is the one in control. However, just as ה' hid himself in the פורים story so too He has hidden himself in the wine we drink on פורים.

Now that we see ה' is the only one truly in control, we can take the next step.

As the saying goes (Talmud Sanhedrin 38a) "In with the wine out with the true-secrets" but what truth and secrets are coming out???

Aside from our mouths... I think that once we have reached this point we have opened our eyes, the windows to the soul. The windows to our Neshama, a piece of ה', and our connection to עולם הבא (עולם האמת or עולם הבא). So maybe on פורים we can turn things over, to be ונהפך הוא, and look the other way through the windows and see not just into our true Neshamot, but glimpse as well the עולם האמת.

What will we see in the עולם האמת? We will see everyone for who s/he truly is. The fakers, the ones that honestly try hard, and the whole range of everyone else.

In פרקי אבות it says (1:6) "קנה לך חבר" – "acquire for yourself a friend," so maybe on Purim as a day of אמת, of truth, when you are seeing everyone in this new light, this is the day to go grab the best friends you can have, so for the rest of the year you will have good friends (possibly the hidden צדיק you didn't notice before).

Well anyways, tomorrow while you and your new friends are stewing in your hangovers, try and take a minute to think about these ideas that can change the rest of your year or life and help you continue in your upward spiral.

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