

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Ki Tisa

Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

15 Adar, 5785

The Fax of Life

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March 15, 2025

GOOD MORNING! As we've discussed, we are now in the Hebrew month of Adar, a month associated with joy. It is also the month in which the miracle of Purim occurred (some 2,500 years ago) when the Jewish people were saved from annihilation at the hands of the wicked Haman – a descendant of the nation of Amalek – the mortal enemy of the Jewish nation.

The holiday of Purim is celebrated on the 14th of Adar almost everywhere in the world, with the notable exception of Jerusalem in which it is celebrated on the 15th of Adar. The reason for this is described in the *Book of Esther*; in brief, the miraculous events of Purim took place on the 14th of Adar, but in the ancient city of Shushan they added an additional day – the 15th of Adar. In the times of the Talmud, this was extended to any city that had a wall surrounding it from the time that the Jewish nation first entered the Holy Land.

According to all opinions Jerusalem was a walled city at that time and the custom has always been that the residents of Jerusalem celebrate Purim on the 15th, while throughout the rest of Israel it is mostly celebrated on the 14th (there are questions about the walled status of some of other ancient cities – notably Tiberias, Hebron, etc. – and there are various customs as to when it is celebrated in those places).

This year we have a unique situation regarding the celebration of Purim. It has only happened a handful of times in the last thirty years and won't occur again for another twenty years! Because the 14th of Adar falls out on a Friday (March 14th), the 15th falls out on Shabbat.

This phenomena is known as "*Purim hameshulash* – the triple Purim," because in Jerusalem the celebrations and *mitzvot* (commandments) associated with Purim are divided over three days beginning on Friday with the reading of the *megilla* – *Book of Esther* – and the special distribution of charity known as *matanot evyonim*, then on Shabbat we add the special thanksgiving prayer *al hanissim* during services and in *Grace After Meals*, and finally on Sunday we have the celebratory meals and give *mishloach manot* – gifts of foods and delicacies to friends and family.

In terms of the ancient city of Shushan, there are some questions as to which city it is in modern day Iran (Susa or Hamadan are seemingly the most likely candidates) and Jews in those cities also celebrate Purim on the 15th of Adar. There are still many Jewish landmarks in those areas and in the 1980's my rabbinical college had many Iranian students who recalled visiting the ruins of the ancient city of Shushan and the tombs of Esther and Mordechai. The tombs of the prophets Daniel and Habakuk are there as well.

The Talmud points out that in messianic times all the holidays will cease to exist – the only holiday that will continue to be celebrated is the holiday of Purim. Likewise, of all the holy books in the Bible the only ones that will remain relevant are the *Five Books of Moses* and the *Book of Esther*. This is a rather astonishing statement. What is so significant about this holiday and the message of the *Book of Esther*? Let's dive a little deeper into what Purim is all about.

Q & A: WHAT IS PURIM AND HOW DO WE CELEBRATE IT?

Purim is a holiday that is truly enjoyed by everyone – it is a day of brotherhood and gift giving and it is a *mitzvah* to have a festive meal; there is much revelry with the requisite eating and imbibing of alcoholic beverages. The custom is for both adults and children to "dress up" in all sorts of costumes and go from house to house spreading joy and giving gifts of delicious foods and wines.

Sadly, this has led some to view Purim as a "Jewish Halloween" of sorts – a terrible sentiment reflecting a superficial understanding of the holiday. (Though this does remind me of the woman who decided she was going to throw a Cinderella themed Purim party for her teenage daughter and her classmates. As she explained; "I am going to have them dress in old clothes and come to the house and do all the laundry and ironing and then scrub the floors and wash the dishes.")

Purim is often misunderstood and seen as a carefree distraction a month before the intensity of Passover. However, this is a mistake. Purim is in fact a MAJOR Jewish holiday – one that imbues the entire month of Adar with the obligation of increasing one's joy.

The story of Purim takes place in ancient Persia, some seventy years after the destruction of the first *Beit Hamikdosh* – the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. As mentioned, Haman hated the Jewish people and he conspired with King Achashverosh (head of the Persian monarchy which, at the time, ruled most of the known world; he is identified in world history as King Xerxes) to utterly annihilate the Jewish people from all corners of the kingdom.

The events surrounding the miraculous salvation of the Jewish nation through the hands of Queen Esther, with the guidance of Mordechai (who was the Jewish leader of the generation and also happened to be her uncle, though others say he was her cousin), are recounted in detail in the *Book of Esther*.

The holiday derives its name from the word "*pur*," which in Persian means "lots" – as in, "Haman cast **lots** for the most 'auspicious' date to kill the Jews." The date drawn was the 13th of Adar. The events of that date turned a day of planned

destruction into a day of victory and joy. As mentioned, outside of Jerusalem and ancient walled cities, Purim is on the 14th of Adar for “they gained relief on the fourteenth, which they made a day of feasting and gladness” (*Esther* 9:17).

What is the explanation for taking the name of the holiday from the seemingly inconsequential incident of how Haman chose the date of his planned annihilation of the Jewish people (through a “*pur* – lots”)?

This seemingly small detail actually goes right to the crux of the issue dividing the Jewish people and the nation of Amalek. The Amalekites choose to believe in the philosophic concept known as deism (that God set creation in motion and thereafter did not intrude into the universe). In their view, God is a *deus absconditus*, a creator who deserted humanity. They want to believe that God has no part in their world.

Thus the ultimate proof of that is lots – a game of absolute chance. In their worldview there is no such thing as fate or destiny – it’s a world governed by chance and happenstance. That’s why Haman chose the day of Jewish annihilation through lots.

Of course, the Jewish people – descendants from Abraham – believe the polar opposite of such a philosophy. Our forefather made it his mission to bring an awareness of God and His immanence in our lives into a pagan world.

After the miraculous exodus from Egypt all the nations of the world recognized God’s intimate involvement with the world, and with the Jewish people in particular. Thus, all the nations of the world were terrified of engaging us in battle – except for Amalek. Immediately after the Jewish people left Egypt the Amalekites embarked on what was clearly a suicide mission and launched a surprise attack. According to Jewish tradition, the Amalekites reasoned that even if they were not successful, they could at least “cool the waters” and show other nations that it was possible to attack the Jewish people.

This suicide mission achieved another goal – it illustrated a key tenet of Amalekite philosophy to all the other nations of the world; i.e. a world in which God is ever present is not a world in which the Amalekites wished to exist. In a theocentric world mankind has obligations and responsibilities, and in this reality mankind is not totally free to do whatever it pleases. So they tried to obliterate the nation that had declared that we live in a theocentric universe – the Jewish nation. Amalek preferred to face death rather than the prospect of not having absolute freedom sans responsibility.

But this ancient battle between the Amalekites and the Jewish nation has a VERY modern application as well.

Because the Amalekites are the embodiment of denial of God’s presence on Earth, they are also the instrument of choice for punishing the Jews when their faith in God falters. Thus, all this continued antisemitism is also a reflection of the Jewish nation’s abandonment of their ancestral faith and continued downward spiral of assimilation. The more we choose to live in a world without our God and our Jewish identity, the stronger the forces of Amalek are brought to bear upon us.

Thus, the story of Purim is crucial to understanding not just the history of the Jewish people, but also the future of the Jewish nation. Even in “the end of times,” we must be cognizant that the very survival of the Jewish nation is dependent solely on our individual commitment to Judaism. We therefore have to recommit to our Jewish identity and living as Jews in a theocentric world. Only in this way can the ideals and purpose of this nationhood last until the final redemption. May we merit seeing it come speedily in our days. Amen.

TORAH PORTION: Ki Tisa, Exodus 30:11 - 34:35

The Torah portion includes: instructions for taking a census (by each person donating a half *shekel*); instructions to make the washstand, anointing oil, and incense for the *Mishkan*, the Portable Sanctuary; appointing Betzalel and Oholiab to head up the architects and craftsmen for the *Mishkan*; a special commandment forbidding the building of the *Mishkan* on Shabbat (people might have thought that they would be allowed to violate the Shabbat to do a *mitzvah*). “The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal covenant for their generations.”

The Torah portion continues with the infamous story of the Golden Calf. The people wrongly calculated that Moses was late in coming down from Mt. Sinai and the people were already seeking a replacement for him by making the Golden Calf (there is a big lesson in patience for us here). Moses sees them dancing around the calf and in anger breaks the Two Tablets; he then punishes the 3,000 wrongdoers (about 0.1% of the 3 million people), pleads to God not to wipe out the people, requests to see the Divine Glory, and receives the second set of Tablets of the Ten Commandments.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 5:10 Miami 7:11 Cape Town 6:47 Guatemala 5:54 Hong Kong 6:15 Honolulu 6:22

🕯️ Jo’Burg 6:06 LA 6:42 London 5:48 Melbourne 7:22 Mexico 6:28 Moscow 6:13 New York 6:44 Singapore 6:58 Toronto 7:05

“QUOTE OF THE WEEK”: On Purim we don’t drink alcohol, we drink distilled spirits. We aren’t alcoholics, we’re spiritual!

Dedicated in Memory of Our Parents:

**Herbert & Muriel Schnider and
Rachel Turner Borkowitz**



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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