**SALT – PURIM 5781**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The *Mishna Berura* (695:15) brings a debate among the halakhic authorities as to whether one must repeat *birkat ha-mazon* after a meal on Purim if he forgot to add *Al Ha-nissim*, the paragraph commemorating the Purim miracle which we add to *birkat ha-mazon*. Generally, when one forgets to include a required addition to *birkat ha-mazon* marking a special occasion on which eating a meal is obligatory, he must repeat *birkat ha-mazon*. Thus, for example, one who mistakenly omits “*Retzei Ve-hachalitzeinu*” in *birkat ha-mazon* on Shabbat must repeat *birkat ha-mazon* if this occurred after one of the first two meals. If this occurred after the third meal, then since some opinions do not require eating bread at the third meal, one does not repeat *birkat ha-mazon*. And on Rosh Chodesh, when eating a meal is not, strictly speaking, obligatory, one who forgets to recite *ya’aleh ve-yavo* in *birkat ha-mazon* does not repeat *birkat ha-mazon*. The halakhic authorities debate the question of whether this applies also to *Al Ha-nissim* on Purim, when eating a meal is obligatory. One opinion maintains that just as with regard to “*Retzei*” after the first two meals on Shabbat, one who forgets to recite “*Al Ha-nissim*” on Purim must repeat *birkat ha-mazon*. Others, however, maintain that the “*Al Ha-nissim*” recitation was not instituted as a strict requirement, and thus its omission does not invalidate *birkat ha-mazon*.

The *Mishna Berura* proceeds to clarify, based on the *Magein Avraham*, that this dispute pertains only to the first meal that one eats on Purim. Generally, people eat a small breakfast on Purim morning, and then conduct a large, festive *se’udat Purim* (Purim feast) later in the day, in the afternoon. Technically, one fulfills his obligation of a Purim meal by eating a small breakfast in the morning. As such, the *Magein Avraham* writes, it is only after that meal that some authorities require repeating *birkat ha-mazon* if one forgets to include “*Al Ha-nissim*.” If, however, this occurred during the *se’uda* later in the day, and one had already fulfilled his minimal obligation by eating a small breakfast in the morning, then according to all opinions, he does not repeat *birkat ha-mazon*. (As for the final *halakha*, the *Mishna Berura* writes that under all circumstances, one who forgets “*Al Ha-nissim*” in *birkat ha-mazon* on Purim does not repeat the recitation.)

This discussion brings to mind the question that many have addressed concerning the possibility of fulfilling a *mitzva* at a higher standard after having already satisfied the basic requirement. It is famously told that Rav Chaim of Brisk once, on Sukkot, had access to two *etrogim* – one which was definitely acceptable, but low quality, and another which was high quality, but had a feature which rendered it possibly disqualified for the *mitzva*. Rav Chaim performed the *mitzva* with both *etrogim*, so he could ensure to fulfill the basic obligation, and also possibly achieve the highest standard. He first took the *etrog* that was possibly disqualified, before then taking the *etrog* which was definitely valid. He explained that if he first took the unquestionably valid *etrog*, then since he would have then fulfilled the *mitzva*, it would be too late to achieve *hiddur* – the higher standard of the *mitzva* performance, by taking the more beautiful *etrog*. In Rav Chaim’s view, once a person fulfilled his basic requirement, it is then too late to fulfill the *mitzva* on a higher level in order to achieve the maximum standard of *mitzva* performance.

Seemingly, then, we might question the widespread practice of having a small meal early during the day on Purim, and then fulfilling the *mitzva* with a large, robust meal in the afternoon. The Rama (O.C. 695:1), citing the *Tur*, writes that one fulfills the *mitzva* of *se’udat Purim* at a higher standard through a large feast. If so, then at least according to Rav Chaim of Brisk, it would seem proper to make the *se’udat Purim* one’s first meal of the day on Purim, for otherwise, after eating breakfast, one can no longer fulfill this *mitzva* at the highest standard, since he had already satisfied the basic obligation.

One approach that has been taken to answer this question is to redefine the *se’udat Purim* obligation. *Megilat Ester* (9:22) formulates this obligation by stating that Purim was established as “a day of feasting and joy.” Significantly, the *Megilla* does not speak of an obligation to conduct a feast on Purim – but rather to observe the day of Purim as a day of feasting. Minimally, this is fulfilled through just one, simple meal, but nevertheless, even additional feasts fulfill this *mitzva*, which requires making Purim a day of feasting. As such, one achieves the highest standard of *mitzva* observance by indulging even in one’s second meal of the day, as every meal eaten over the course of the day contributes to the fulfillment of the *se’udat Purim* obligation. At the same time, all agree that one who forgets “*Al Ha-nissim*” in *birkat ha-mazon* after the second meal does not repeat *birkat ha-mazon*, since the minimum requirement was fulfilled by eating the first meal.

(Taken from the pamphlet [*Mayim Zakim*, Purim, 5780](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/256_20_80.pdf))

Sunday

*Megilat Ester* introduces the Purim story by stating, “It was in the days of Achashveirosh – this is Achashveirosh who reigned from India until Ethiopia…” Commenting on the seeming redundancy in this verse (“of Achashveirosh – this is Achashveirosh”), the Midrash (*Ester Rabba* 1:1) explains that the repetition serves to underscore the king’s self-contradictory behavior. In the beginning of the story told in the *Megilla*, Achashveirosh killed his queen at the behest of his trusted confidant, but toward the end of the story, he killed his trusted confidant at the behest of his queen. He obeyed Memukhan’s advice to have Vashti executed for refusing his order to appear before the men at his feast, but later, he ordered Haman’s execution at the request of Queen Ester. And thus the *Megilla* begins, “It was in the days of Achashveirosh – this is Achashveirosh,” emphasizing that the same King Achashveirosh who killed his wife at the request of his advisor, later killed his advisor at the request of his wife.

Rav Moshe Alshikh explains that the Midrash here seeks to dispel the misconception that the Jews’ salvation was not the result of a miracle. One might have argued that Achashveirosh naturally killed Haman and authorized the Jews to defend themselves because of his great love for his queen, who was a Jewess. This was not a miracle, one might have concluded, but rather simply the effect of Achashveirosh’s natural love and affection for his beautiful, graceful and kind queen. The Midrash therefore draws our attention to the fact that Achashveirosh had previously done just the opposite, siding with his advisor’s recommendation to have his queen killed. It was far from obvious that Achashveirosh would choose Queen Ester over Haman, and this decision should therefore be recognized and celebrated as the great miracle which it was.

More generally, we might suggest that the Midrash here highlights one of the primary themes of the Purim story – unpredictability and randomness. Throughout the *Megilla*, matters of life and death – and even the possible extermination of an entire people – hinged on the arbitrary whims of an erratic, impulsive king. When Ester approached the king after hearing of Haman’s edict, the fate of the Jewish Nation depended solely on the king’s instinctive reaction upon seeing her, on whether he would be angered by her approaching him without having been summoned, or would be enchanted by her grace and beauty. Achashveirosh’s impulsivity and unpredictability are manifest in the opposite ways he dealt with Vashti and Ester – executing Vashti to please his advisor, and executing his advisor to please Ester. Each time, he reached a drastic decision with far-reaching implications at whim. The centrality of this theme to the Purim story can be seen in the very name “*Purim*,” which, as the *Megilla* itself tells (9:26), commemorates the “*pur*” – the lots cast by Haman to decide the day on which to eradicate the Jews. Many have explained that a lottery embodies the notion of randomness and unpredictability. The word “Purim” depicts vulnerability, how our wellbeing and even our very lives depend on seemingly random factors beyond our control. Our festive celebration of this day expresses our belief that despite the outward appearance of randomness, in truth, everything that happens is precisely orchestrated by the Almighty, under whose loving, protective care we live at every moment. Realizing our fragility should lead us not to fear, but rather to a greater appreciation for, and belief in, God’s grace and kindness.

This theme of the Purim celebration may perhaps shed light on the obligation to drink wine on Purim to the point of (mild) inebriation. The Gemara (Megilla 7b) famously states, “A person is obligated to become inebriated on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘accursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordekhai’.” When we are inebriated, and our judgment is impaired, we cannot easily make rational, calculated decisions. We act on impulse, rather than after carefully deciding how to conduct ourselves. A drunkard essentially surrenders his life to chance, as he is incapable of properly caring for himself. Intoxication on Purim may thus serve to underscore the notion of randomness and happenstance, how even when we act unthinkingly, on impulse, unable to determine the right (“blessed is Mordekhai”) and wrong (“accursed is Haman”) thing to do, we trust in God’s protection and assistance. As King David famously said about himself, “Even as I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me” (Tehillim 23:4). Even when we feel “inebriated,” incapable of caring for and protecting ourselves in this unpredictable world, we should feel safe and secure knowing we are under God’s care. And thus on Purim, when we celebrate our faith in God’s protection in this seemingly “random” world, we drink to the point of intoxication, disabling our rational faculties, expressing our firm belief that God is caring for us when we are unable to care for ourselves.

Monday

*Megilat Ester* gives a detailed description of Mordekhai’s regal attire when he left King Achashveirosh’s presence after being appointed vizier in Haman’s stead (8:15). We read that he was dressed in blue and white royal garb, a golden crown, and a linen *takhrikh* (“mantle”) dyed purple.

The Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (16a-b) draws a connection between this verse, which lists five different kinds of colors or materials (blue, white, gold, linen, purple), and the five changes of clothing which Yosef gave to his younger brother, Binyamin. We read in Sefer Bereishit (45:22) that after Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers, before sending them back to Canaan to bring their father, he gave each brother one change of clothing, and gave four extra changes of clothing to his only full brother, Binyamin. The Gemara poses the question of why Yosef would show favoritism to one brother by giving him extra clothing as a special gift – repeating the precise same mistake made by his father, who made for him a special garment (Bereishit 37:3). This favoritism showed to Yosef aroused his brothers’ envy, leading to their nearly killing him and then selling him as a slave. How, then, could Yosef now do the same, giving Binyamin extra changes of clothing? The Gemara replies that Yosef gave Binyamin five changes of clothing as an allusion to the five royal garments which his descendant, Mordekhai, would wear upon being appointed vizier of the Persian Empire.

Many writers addressed the question as to the basis for this connection between the story of Yosef and his brothers, and Mordekhai’s appointment as vizier in Haman’s stead. Why would the Gemara link these two seemingly unrelated episodes?

One explanation, perhaps, is that *Chazal* here draw our attention to the difference between the effect that Yosef’s special garment had on his brothers, and the effect that Mordekhai’s special royal attire had on his brethren, the Jews of Shushan. The verse tells that when Mordekhai left Achashveirosh’s palace donned in regal garb, “…the city of Shushan was elated and joyous. The Jews had light, joy, exultation and honor.” Whereas Yosef’s garment, which signified his special stature, caused his brothers fierce jealousy, Mordekhai’s special stature brought his brethren to ecstatic celebration. The reason is clear: Yosef’s brothers viewed his status as a threat, whereas the Jews of Shushan knew that Mordekhai’s appointment saved them from a threat, empowering them to oppose the enemies who would attack them come the 13th of Adar. As the final verse in the *Megilla* tells, Mordekhai was “great among the Jews, accepted by the majority of his brethren, who sought the wellbeing of his people…” The Jews celebrated Mordekhai’s rise to stature because they understood that his position enabled him to work on their behalf and advance their best interests.

By drawing this contrast between the reactions to Yosef and Mordekhai’s rise to greatness, the Gemara perhaps seeks to urge us to celebrate, rather than resent, the successes and accomplishments of our peers. Rather than envy or begrudge those who have risen to positions of prestige, we should welcome their achievements and recognize them as opportunities for helping and benefiting *Am Yisrael*. The pain and anguish caused by Yosef’s brothers’ jealousy can be transformed into the great joy and festivity of Purim once we are able to genuinely rejoice in other people’s successes and pray that they, like Mordekhai, utilize their stature for the sake of helping the Jewish Nation.

Tuesday

The Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (10b) comments that the word “*va-yehi*” (“it was,” or “it happened”) is used in the *Tanakh* as an expression portending calamity. One example brought by the Gemara is the opening verse of *Megilat Ester*, which famously introduces the Purim story with the words, “***Va-yehi*** *bi-ymei Achashveirosh*” – “It was during the times of Achashveirosh…” The *Megilla* proceeds to tell of the rise of Haman and his edict to have the Jews annihilated, and thus it begins with the word “*va-yehi*,” which foretells tragedy.

Rav Yaakov of Lisa (author of the *Netivot* *Ha-mishpat*), in his *Megilat Setarim* commentary to *Megilat Ester*, notes a distinction between this instance of “*va-yehi*” and the other examples mentioned by the Gemara. In this instance, the calamity portended by the word “*va-yehi*” – Haman’s edict – unfolds much later in the text. The phrase “*Va-yehi bi-ymei Achashveirosh*” introduces the story of Achashveirosh’s feast, during which his queen disobeyed him, prompting him to select a new queen, a process which led to Ester becoming queen of Persia. This incident actually prepared the Jews for the solution to the crisis which arose afterward with Haman’s rise to power in the empire. Thus, the word “*va-yehi*” in this instance introduces not a story of crisis, but rather the story that ended up resolving the crisis. By contrast, the Gemara cites the example of the opening verse of *Megilat Rut*, which states, “***Va-yehi*** *bi-ymei shefot ha-shofteim va-yehi ra’av ba-aretz*” – “It was during the time when the judges ruled, and there was a famine in the land.” Here, the crisis is mentioned immediately following the introductory word “*va-yehi*.” Likewise, the Gemara points to the verse in Sefer Bereishit (14:1), “*Va-yehi bi-ymei Amrafel*” (“It was in the times of Amrafel”), which introduces the story of a deadly war involving nine kingdoms. Here, too, the calamity – the military conflict – is mentioned immediately after the word “*va-yehi*.” The other examples cited by the Gemara also follow this pattern – of the word “*va-yehi*” directly introducing a situation of trouble. The question thus arises as to why the Gemara considered “*Va-yehi bi-ymei Achashveirosh*” as an example of this pattern, when the calamity is mentioned only much later in the text, and this verse introduces a story which actually yielded a beneficial outcome.

Rav Yaakov of Lisa creatively suggests that in truth, there is a calamity mentioned already in this introductory verse, which continues, “He was Achashveirosh, who reigned from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces.” The Jews faced a dire threat because the entire territory throughout which they were dispersed was part of Achashveirosh’s empire. Had the region under Achashveirosh’s control not been so vast, only a portion of the Jewish Nation would have come under threat. The danger arose because Achashveirosh reigned over such a vast area which encompassed all Jewish populations at that time. This reality – the entirety of *Am Yisrael* living under the governance of a single ruler – was itself a crisis, as it directly threatened our nation’s future. And so, indeed, the word “*va-yehi*” at the beginning of *Megilat Ester* introduces a calamity – the fragile state of a Jewish Nation dependent entirely on the grace of a single monarch.

This concept can be applied also to our lives as individuals. We face grave danger when we make our state of contentment dependent entirely on a single factor. If our sense of self-worth, self-fulfillment or general satisfaction hinges on a single condition, then we are at risk for emotional “annihilation.” When Yaakov feared a violent attack by Eisav, he divided his family and property into two camps, figuring that in case Eisav came and succeeded in killing and destroying one camp, “the remaining camp will survive” (Bereishit 32:8). Some have suggested that Yaakov’s strategy conveys the broader message of being able to “salvage” contentment and happiness even when we experience loss or disappointment in one or several areas of life. In order to maintain our joy and vitality, we need to view our lives as consisting of numerous different “camps,” from which we can derive enjoyment and satisfaction independently, even if the other “camps” are “lost.” Even if one or several areas of life fail to deliver the happiness and fulfillment we expected, we should still be able to experience happiness and fulfillment from other areas of life. And thus we should try to avoid the vulnerable situation described in the first verse of *Megilat Ester* – where our overall wellbeing is controlled by just a single “king.” Instead, we should strive to derive joy and fulfillment from the various different aspects of our lives, so that even if some disappoint, we can draw happiness from the others.

Wednesday

The *Shoshanat Yaakov* hymn, which is traditionally read following the reading of the *Megilla* reading on Purim, concludes by mentioning Charvona, a servant of Achashveirosh who informed the king of Haman’s desire to kill Mordekhai. After Ester revealed to the king that she belonged to the nation upon which Haman decreed annihilation, as Achashveirosh seethed with anger, Charvona – likely in a deliberate attempt to seal Haman’s fate – told Achashveirosh about the gallows which Haman had prepared for the purpose of hanging Mordekhai, who had once saved the king’s life (7:9). The king immediately ordered that Haman be hung on those same gallows. In the *Shoshanat Yaakov* hymn, after speaking in praise of the righteous figures in the *Megilla* and denouncing the wicked, we proclaim, “*…ve-gam Charvona zakhur la-tov*” – “…and Charvona, too, is to be fondly remembered.”

Why do we make a point of mentioning Charvona in this prayer? What was so significant about his role, that he should be “fondly remembered”? Moreover, the Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (16a) states that Charvona had initially been part of Haman’s scheme against the Jews, and it was only at that moment, seeing that the king was angry at Haman, that Charvona instantly betrayed Haman and reported to the king about his plan to execute Mordekhai. Charvona’s act was hardly noble; this was a matter of cruel political expediency, turning on his erstwhile ally upon seeing his sudden downfall. Why, then, is Charvona “*zakhur la-tov*” – to be “remembered fondly”?

The Klausenberger Rebbe answers that the intent of this hymn is precisely to teach that there is value in good deeds we perform even with less than sincere motives. Needless to say, we ought to strive to observe all *mitzvot* out of a genuine, deeply-ingrained desire to serve our Creator and fulfill His will. However, even during those times when we feel a lack of motivation, and we do the right thing only because of vested interests, this, too, is valuable, albeit less than ideal. And so after condemning the wicked and extolling the righteous in this hymn, we add, “and Charvona, too, is to be fondly remembered.” We note that although he acted against Haman out of vested personal interests, we still remember him “fondly,” because he did, after all, do the right thing in bringing about the execution of a dangerous, evil man.

The Klausenberger Rebbe goes so far as to suggest that this concept underlies the seemingly peculiar choice of the name of this holiday – Purim. As we read in the *Megilla* (9:26), this name commemorates the “*pur*” – the lots cast by Haman when he set out to decide the day on which to kill the Jews in the empire. Many have raised the question of why this seemingly peripheral aspect of the story was chosen as the basis for the name of this festive celebration. The Klausenberger Rebbe answered that a decision reached by casting lots is the quintessential example of an unintended outcome, producing a result without having wished for it. The name “Purim” was chosen to emphasize to us the value of even insincerely driven positive outcomes, that we should not belittle any good deed we or others perform, regardless of the level of sincerity with which it was done.

One of the themes of the Purim celebration is the rediscovery of our inner goodness, sanctity and connection to the Almighty. The Jews of Persia were submerged in a decadent, gluttonous society, participating in lavish feasts in Shushan instead of working to restore the *Beit Ha-mikdash* in Jerusalem. The experience of Haman’s threat and the subsequent miracle inspired a spiritual reawakening, the rekindling of their inner spark which was unnoticeable but which was never extinguished. On Purim, we celebrate our and our fellow Jews’ inherent goodness and sanctity, which is often hidden, but ever present. As such, it is a time to appreciate and value each and every *mitzva* we or others perform. True, we can look at any given act and find fault in the manner it was done or the motivation behind it. But on Purim, we are to look at ourselves and at others from the precise opposite perspective, to see only the goodness, to identify, appreciate, admire and celebrate every positive aspect of every person – including ourselves – no matter how small. For this reason, we are required to give gifts and generously dispense charity, feeling and expressing friendship and affection to all, regardless of who they are, finding reasons to respect and love our fellow Jew. And, we are to joyously feast and rejoice over all that is good about ourselves and our special nation, focusing our attention solely on our achievements and positive qualities, appreciating the great value of each and every one.

Thursday

The *Mishna Berura* (695:9) cites the *Shela* as teaching that the Purim feast should preferably be held during the morning hours on Purim. This practice is cited also by the *Kaf Ha-chayim* (695:23) in the name of the famous Kabbalist, the Rashash (Rav Shalom Sherabi). By contrast, the Rama (695:2) observes the prevalent custom among *Ashkenazim* to begin the meal on Purim afternoon, though he objects to the practice followed by some to begin the meal close to sundown, such that the majority of the feast takes place at nighttime. The Rama writes that although the meal may extend into the night, the majority of the meal must be held before sunset. The *Magen Avraham* (695:5) comments that the custom developed to conduct the meal in the afternoon to allow time for the other *mitzvot* that must be performed on Purim day – hearing the reading of the *Megilla*, and distributing *mishloach manot* and *matanot la-evyonim*.

However, the Rama adds, when Purim falls on Friday, the Purim feast should be held specifically in the morning, in the interest of showing proper respect for Shabbat. If the Purim feast is held in the afternoon, as usual, then one will not have an appetite for the Friday night Shabbat meal, thereby infringing upon the honor of Shabbat. The *Magein Avraham* (695:9) cites earlier authorities, including the Maharil, as maintaining that in such a case, when Purim is observed on Friday, one should follow the practice known as “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*.” This refers to the *halakha* which allows one who had begun a meal on Friday afternoon before Shabbat (under circumstances when this is allowed) to continue the meal when Shabbat begins. He simply covers the food on the table, formally accepts Shabbat (and the Shabbat candles are lit), and recites *kiddush*. He may then continue the meal into the night, and recite the evening *arvit* prayer after dark. This practice is mentioned by the Gemara (Pesachim 100a) and *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 271:4) as a legitimate option any Friday, and the *Magein Avraham* cites those who feel this is the proper practice when Purim falls on Friday. Indeed, the Meiri (Ketubot 7b) writes that this was his practice when Purim was observed on Friday.

Interestingly, common practice follows neither custom. When Purim falls on Friday, most people neither conduct the meal in the morning, as the Rama writes, nor begin the meal before Shabbat and then recite *kiddush* and continue when Shabbat begins. Rather, the meal is customarily eaten in the early afternoon, and after the meal, we prepare for Shabbat and then begin Shabbat before sundown as usual. The question arises as to the reason behind the custom to eat the meal in the early afternoon, following neither the custom of the Rama nor that of “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*.”

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%d7%a4%d7%95%d7%a8%d7%99%d7%9d-%d7%94%d7%9e%d7%a9%d7%95%d7%9c%d7%a9-%d7%aa%d7%a9%d7%a4%d7%90/) suggests that the Rama’s view is perhaps not practiced today for the same practical reason why we generally do not conduct the Purim feast in the morning – because we are preoccupied with the other Purim obligations. Moreover, as we customarily indulge in meat and wine at the Purim feast, and such foods are not commonly eaten during the morning in our society, the custom evolved to schedule the Purim feast for the afternoon even when Purim is celebrated on Friday.

As for the option of “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*,” Rav Weiss notes that in general, although this practice is halakhically acceptable, Kabbalistic tradition opposed it. The Arizal (cited by the *Kaf Ha-chayim*, O.C. 271:22)taught that there is great significance to the sequence of first reciting the Friday evening *kabbalat Shabbat* service, followed by the *arvit* prayer and then *kiddush*. The procedure of “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*” results in *kiddush* preceding the recitation of *kabbalat Shabbat* and *arvit*, and this might be one reason why it is not commonly followed. Moreover, the *Shulchan Arukh* (271:4) cites two opinions as to whether one must recite a new *berakha* over bread after reciting *kiddush* in the situation of “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*.” This might be yet another reason why this practice is customarily not observed – in order to avoid this predicament, where different opinions exist as to whether a *berakha* should be recited. Thirdly, Rav Weiss references the Talmud Yerushalmi’s discussion in Masekhet Megilla (1:4) regarding the situation of Purim which falls on Shabbat (which can happen in Jerusalem, where Purim is observed on the 15th of Adar). The Yerushalmi comments that the festive Purim meal cannot be eaten on Shabbat (and is therefore delayed to Sunday), because the Purim meal must be special and distinct, and not a meal that is already mandated by a separate halakhic obligation. The practice of “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*” when Purim falls on Friday means extending the Purim meal to become the Shabbat meal, which might be unacceptable in light of the requirement to keep the Purim meal separate from the Shabbat meal. This might be another reason why common custom is not to follow this practice.

Finally, Rav Weiss points to what he regards as the primary reason for why this practice is not commonly followed – the Rama’s ruling (O.C. 249:2) that it is preferable not to eat a meal on late Friday afternoon, starting from nine halakhic hours into the day. Strictly speaking, it is permissible to eat a normal-sized meal anytime Friday afternoon, and to eat even an especially large meal if this meal constitutes a *se’udat mitzva* (obligatory meal) that must be eaten that day (such as in the case of a *berit mila* or *pidyon ha-bein*). However, the Rama writes that it is proper to abstain from even such meals late Friday afternoon, out of respect for Shabbat. Therefore, although the Purim feast is, technically, permissible anytime on Friday, the custom developed to complete the meal before the end of the ninth hour, thus precluding the practice of “*poreis mapa u-mekadeish*.”

Friday

The Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (15a-b) relates that years before Haman’s rise to the position of vizier of the Persian Empire, he was destitute. In order to save himself from starvation, he sold himself to Mordekhai – who would later become his nemesis – as his servant, in exchange for simple loaves of bread.

Rav Yechezkel Shraga Weinfeld (*Ha-chodesh Asher Nehepakh*, pp. 55-56) notes the significance of Haman’s humble beginnings, his having been an impoverished pauper forced to sell himself as a servant. Haman is portrayed by the *Megilla* as a man of extraordinary confidence and ambition. Even when he reached the point where the king ordered all his subjects to prostrate before him, Haman found it unacceptable – and utterly intolerable – that a single individual disobeyed. Haman refused to settle for anything less than 100 percent compliance with the king’s order that he be shown reverence. Later, when Achashveirosh asked Haman to advise him how to bestow honor upon someone whom he wished to reward, Haman immediately assumed that the king was talking about him: “Haman said to himself, ‘To whom would the king desire to give honor more than me?’” (6:6). And his response to the king reveals just how high his aspirations were – advising the king to have the person paraded through the city in the king’s chariot, wearing the king’s clothing. Despite his humble beginnings, Haman did not feel limited in any way. Although he had once been a lowly slave, he had complete confidence in himself, dreamt of the highest levels of glory and prestige, and never doubted his ability to realize these dreams to their very fullest.

Rav Weinfeld suggested that this aspect of Haman’s character might serve as an instructive model for us. His confident, relentless pursuit of wealth and prestige despite his humble past should perhaps motivate and encourage us to pursue greatness regardless of our past. Just as Haman did not see his prior experiences as an impediment to the realization of his dreams of fame and glory, we, too, should not see our prior experiences as an impediment to our attainment of spiritual greatness. Regardless of our humble beginnings, we should pursue excellence with the same confidence and ambition with which Haman pursued fame. And just as Haman was not satisfied with anything less than the highest peaks of glory, we, too, should strive for the highest levels of achievement, without settling for anything less. Additionally, Rav Weinfeld concludes, just as Haman brazenly set out to destroy the entire Jewish Nation, “from young to old, children and women,” so should each of us aspire to uplift our entire nation, firmly and confidently believing in our ability to contribute and make a significant impact.

In the spirit of “*ve-nahafokh hu*” – the theme of opposites, which features prominently in the Purim celebration – we should look to Haman, ironically enough, as a great source of motivation and inspiration to trust our capabilities, to dream, to aspire, to set for ourselves lofty and ambitious goals, and to unflinchingly pursue them, without allowing our past mistakes and failures to deter us.

**THE FIRST DECADE OF SALT ARCHIVES CAN BE FOUND AT:**

[www.etzion.org.il/en/salt-archives.html](http://etzion.org.il/en/salt-surf-little-torah-archives)

**MORE RECENT INSTALLMENTS OF SALT DIVREI TORAH CAN BE FOUND AT:**

[www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/salt-surf-little-torah-weekly-files](http://www.etzion.org.il/en/topics/salt-surf-little-torah-weekly-files)