

## **Purim**

*Rav Yehuda Henkin*

The Talmud states: "One must drink on Purim until one no longer knows the difference between arur Haman, 'Haman be cursed,' and baruch Mordechai, 'Mordechai be blessed.'

" It seems strange, to be ordered to get drunk. But the Sages did not say to confuse "Haman be cursed" with "Haman be blessed," or "Mordechai be blessed" with "Mordechai be cursed." That would really require drinking! "Haman be cursed" and "Mordechai be blessed," by contrast, are two sides of the same coin.

Truth seems to lie with the somewhat dour interpretation that one should border on inebriation, but not quite cross the line.

Perhaps the Sages meant that there are two sides to the miracle of Purim: Haman's downfall, and Mordechai's salvation. But on Purim, we should not spend time analyzing them. Just drink and be merry!

However, this interpretation does not explain why the Talmud mentions "Haman be cursed" before "Mordechai be blessed." We might have expected the opposite order. Rather, the statement is symbolic. Throughout history, we have seen arur Haman. Every enemy of the Jewish people has been overthrown and banished from the stage of history. But we have not yet seen baruch Mordechai. We are not redeemed. Even today, many of us remain "servants of Ahasuerus."

Were we to dwell on this fact, that arur Haman is not yet the same as baruch Mordechai, we wouldn't enjoy ourselves on Purim at all. Therefore the Sages said, drown this crucial distinction in drink, and be happy.

Lechayim!

### **NOTES**

1. This talk, originally spoken on the Israel Radio English Service, was preceded by the following exchange:

Q. Can you connect Purim with this week's Torah portion, Ki Tisa?

A. A good rabbi can connect anything with anything. Or should I say, a good rabbi can, and a bad rabbi will.

The connection between Ki Tisa and Purim is: just as the Israelites conditioned themselves spiritually for a census based on military needs by giving machatzit hashekel (see Chibah Yeteirah on Pekudei) so, too, the Jews prayed and fasted in preparation for battle on the thirteenth of Adar (see Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 686).

2. BT Megillah 7a.

3. See Aruch haShulchan, Orach Chayim 695:5.

4. Turei Zahav, 695:1.

5. BT Megillah 14a.

NOTE: Rabbi Henkin's book, **EQUALITY LOST: Essays in Torah Commentary, Halacha, and Jewish Thought** (Urim Press), has just been published. It is distributed outside of

Israel by Lambda Publishers, 3709 13th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11218, tel. (718) 972-5449, fax (718) 972-6307.

Volumes II and III of Rabbi Henkin's Hebrew responsa Bnei Banim (also containing Chibah Yeteirah on the Torah) are also available through Lambda Publishers, or directly from the author, P.O.B. 35173, Jerusalem 91351, tel./fax (972-2) 652-1473.

2. Cf. Jeremiah 44:21, and frequently.