



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 28TH, 2013 / יט' אדר תשע"ג

PARSHA:

Ki Tisa / כי תשא

SERMON TITLE:

Appreciating Deeds, Not Motives

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman
who loved and supported Torah learning.

Ki Tisa

Appreciating Deeds, Not Motives

Good Shabbos!

With Purim still on our minds, it's a good time to bring up what happened at one of the most recent meetings between U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

At that meeting, as the meeting wound down after two hours of talking, especially about the Iranian threat, Netanyahu gave Obama a gift of a decorated Megilas Esther, the Scroll of Esther, saying, "Even back then they wanted to eradicate the Jewish Nation."

We all heard the Megillah this past Purim, and over the years we may have even learned some of it in Hebrew School. So, since I'm sure that everyone here is familiar with the story, I'll start this time from the end of the story.

As you know, at the end of every movie, the credits roll up the screen listing the entire cast and crew. And so, after the reading of the Megillah, there is a short poem of sorts that essentially functions as the same thing.

So let's open up our Siddurim here and take a look and read the verses of "Shoshanas Yaakov" together.

After the first few lines, you'll see that we read the following: "Cursed be Haman who sought to destroy. This concept of remembering that Haman is accursed comes to us from the Midrash, which tells us about Rav, one of the first Amoraim of Bavel (Babylon), who would say, "Cursed is Haman and cursed are his sons" when the Megillah readers would get to the word "Haman."

It's safe to say that as a result of this, the custom was born that instead of interrupting the Megillah reading by saying "Cursed be Haman," we make noise with noisemakers instead.

But then Shoshanas Yaakov continues: "Blessed is Mordechai the Jew." This is because when we invoke or mention a tzadik, a righteous man, we bless him, as the verse states: "Zeicher tzadik liv'rachah"—the remembrance of a righteous man is for a blessing.

And in the very next sentence, we mention the women: “Cursed be Zeresh the wife of my frightener” (referring to Haman), and, by contrast, “Blessed be Esther for me (meaning, because she risked her life for me).

Now, these names are more or less names we’ve all heard of. True, Zeresh may be a bit less famous but still, she was Haman’s wife.

But then, after we recite, “Cursed be all the wicked ones, blessed be all the righteous ones,” we conclude Shoshanas Yaakov with, “and also Charvonah, may he be remembered for good.”

But who is this Charvonah guy? He’s not on any list of people we regularly bless. But on the other hand, neither do we curse him. And not only that, but we remember him for good, too?

Now, Charvonah appears twice in the Megillah. The first time is right in the beginning, where King Achashverosh is arranging a party in his capital city of Shushan, and we read: “On the seventh day, when the king’s heart was good with wine,” he instructed his seven chamberlains to bring Queen Vashti—and one of the chamberlains was Charvona.

Nine years later, we again read about Charvonah in the Megillah. This time, he’s in Chapter 7, when Esther goes to plead before King Achashverosh so as to rescue the Jewish Nation. It was the night of the Passover Seder, and the king asked her, “What do you want, Queen Esther?” and she said that only tomorrow night at a second party will she tell the king what she wanted.

The following night—the second Seder night—Queen Esther asked the king, “Give me my life as a gift.”

And so the king asked, “Who’s this person who wants to kill you?!” and she replied, “Haman hara hazeh!”—this evil Haman.

The Megillah then tells us that the king got so angry at hearing that that he stepped out of the room into the garden outside to get some fresh air—and that when he came back in, he found Haman fallen upon Esther’s couch.

And that, understandably, got the king even angrier. He said, “Will you even subdue the queen with me in the house?!” At that moment we again hear the voice of Charvonah, who proceeded to utter one sentence: “There’s also the tree that Haman made for Mordechai... standing in Haman’s house.” And the king immediately ordered: “Hang him on it!”

The Talmud (Tractate Megillah 16a) says that as far as we know, Charvona was “a wicked person in that plot.” He had planned the idea of hanging Mordechai from the tree together with Haman—otherwise, how would he have known that the tree existed in the first place? Haman himself had no reason to tell anyone about it—not even the king. And so the tree was a closely guarded secret of which only one who had a part in the plans knew about it.

But here, the very moment Charvona saw that everything was turning around in Mordechai's favor, he used the opportunity and snitched to the king about the tree that Haman had prepared for Mordechai who had rescued the king.

Thus, it was Charvona who got Haman hanged.

As a general rule, when you meet this kind of dubious creature—a person who essentially was Haman's advisor who helped him put up the tree and who switched to the winning side at the last minute—you want to put him not on the "good guys" list but on the list of the accursed ones. And, to an extent, such people are even worse than the out-and-out "bad guys"—these are people who have no trustworthiness and who can change their colors in one second. They arouse disgust.

Nevertheless, along comes Rabbi Pinchas (Talmud Yerushalmi, Tractate Megillah 83:5) and says that when we get to the name of Charvonah in the Megillah, we need to say: "Charvona, zachur l'tov"—Charvonah, may he be remembered for good, because the bottom line is that he was the one who relieved the Jewish Nation of Haman, even though he did not do it for ideological reasons and certainly not because he wanted to help the Jewish Nation. Being that he was the one who actually caused Haman to be hanged, the Jewish Nation remembers him for good for all generations.

Indeed, throughout all the generations, those who did good for the Jews, even if they did them for personal motives and for their own good, the Jewish Nation still always remembered them for the good they did. For example, the famous story of Oskar Schindler, who rescued 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust even though he did it, at least initially, for his own benefit of having them work in his factory for free—the bottom line is he saved Jews, and the only ones who remember him for it are the Jews.

Many of you may be familiar with the Balfour Declaration. Lord Arthur James Balfour was the Foreign Secretary of the British Empire, and a religious man who loved the Bible and who believed that G-d wants the Jews to return to the Holy Land. And so, on November 2, 1917, he wrote a letter stating, among other things, that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." In this declaration, many saw a historical breakthrough—Great Britain was a world power at the time, and for them to recognize that the Land of Israel belonged to the Nation of Israel and declare so publicly was a major achievement.

And even though Lord Balfour himself regretted that letter years later, and the British found themselves fighting against the entry of Jews into the Holy Land, the Jewish Nation still remembers Lord Balfour for good—and as such, there are more streets named Balfour in Israel than there are in England.

And this custom, my friends, is something the Jewish Nation learned from Rabbi Pinchas: "One needs to recite, 'Charvona, may he be remembered for good.' "

And what was true for Charvonah and Lord Balfour then is true now, too. Anyone who helps the Jews, regardless of their motives or whatever agenda they're trying to advance, is appreciated by the Jews.

Because, in Judaism, it's the final result that counts. Action is the essence.

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אה ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.