

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PURIM SPECIAL

### DVAR TORAH: WHY ESTHER AND MORDECHAI?

Hashem ties national miracles to particular tzaddikim: Moshe splits the Sea; Yehoshua conquers the seven Canaanite nations; Devorah, Barak, and Yael bring down Sisera; and Mordechai are central to the Purim miracle. Why were Esther and Mordechai chosen as the key figures in bringing about the Divine salvation of the Jews in the Purim miracle?

Harav Shlomo Wolbe, זצ"ל (1915-2005, in Alei Shur Volume II, pp. 469-470: "The Purim Miracle and an Approach to Service of G-d") answers that Esther and Mordechai's special qualities are connected to the special qualities of the Purim miracle.

Rav Wolbe explains: Miracles can be graded by how much G-d suspends the laws of nature He built into His world. At the splitting of the sea, water stood up like a wall – clearly against water's nature – to save the Jewish People from the aggressive Egyptian army. That type of miracle was appropriate for Moshe's generation, when G-d had to teach Egypt, Israel, and the world that all the forces of nature are subordinate to the Almighty. Throughout the generations miracles involve varying degrees of suspending the laws of nature. In the Purim miracle, though, G-d did not intervene in nature. The miracle worked through the interplay of natural events because that generation needed to learn how G-d works through history.

That Divine hiddenness dictated which tzaddikim G-d chose to bring about that unique miracle. He needed people who excelled in the special quality He revealed in that generation, Divine modesty. G-d hid behind the scenes in the Purim story: a queen was killed by an angry hedonistic husband; a plot to kill the emperor was exposed; a pompous minister became entangled by his own arrogance; and G-d wove them all together to save the Jewish People. For the Purim mission, says Rav Wolbe based on the teachings of the Maharal, G-d needed messengers who were hidden, inward, and modest.

Esther and Mordechai were the perfect choices. Esther's very name expresses hiddenness: אסתר shares the letters of the Hebrew root סתר, hidden. She also excelled in personal modesty and had the self-discipline to cover up her identity – ironically, in the most public building of the empire, the king's palace. Mordechai's name is associated with the spices of the incense burned in the Beit Hamikdash. The Targum's rendering of the Hebrew spice מור is מירא דכיא. As opposed to the altar for animal sacrifices, standing in the outer courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash, the incense altar was hidden within. The heights of incense offering was on Yom Kippur when the Kohen Gadol entered deep within the Beit Hamikdash and offered incense in the Kodesh Kodashim, the inner sanctum hidden behind the Parochet.

Ironically, the great mitzvah of Purim is פרסום הנס, publicizing the miracle that expressed Divine modesty. We are to reveal how G-d saved His People, through quietly directing the interaction of human events. The lesson of Purim is to cultivate the Divine characteristic that Mordechai and Esther modelled, to excel in modesty even in the public forum.

## SOURCE GUIDE: WHO WAS CHARVONAH?

Who was the Charvonah who suggested to hang Haman on the same gallows he had prepared for Mordechai? And why do we add the line “Charvonah is also remembered for the good” in the prayer following the Megillah reading?

### A. Charvonah is Eliahu

Note how righteous Charvonah seems. By being in the right place at the right time and saying the right words to the right person he brings about the downfall of the greatest evildoer of his time:

<p><b>1. Esther 7:8-10</b>                  (8) The king returned from the palace garden to the hall of the wine feast and Haman had fallen on the couch Esther was on. And the king said, “Do you also want to seduce the queen while I am home?” That came out of the king’s mouth and Haman’s face was full of shame. (9) Charvonah, one of the ministers before the king, said, “Behold, the fifty-cubit high wooden gallows that Haman prepared for Mordechai – who spoke positively on behalf of the king - stands in Haman’s house. The king said, “Hang him on it!” (10) They hung Haman on the tree that he had prepared for Mordechai and the king’s anger subsided.</p>	<p><b>אסתר ז:ח-י</b>                  (ח) וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יָשָׁב מִגַּנְתֵּי הַבַּיִת אֶל בֵּית מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן וְהָמָן נָפַל עַל הַמִּטָּה אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ הֲגַם לְכַבּוֹשׁ אֶת הַמִּלְכָּה עִמִּי בַּבַּיִת הַדָּבָר יֵצֵא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּפְנֵי הָמָן חָפוּ. (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר <b>חַרְבוֹנָה</b> אֶחָד מִן הַסֵּרִיסִים לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ גַּם הִנֵּה הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָמָן לְמַרְדֵּכָי אֲשֶׁר דָּבָר טוֹב עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ לַעֲמֹד בַּבַּיִת הָמָן גָּבַהּ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְהוּ עָלָיו. (י) וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת הָמָן עַל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר הֵכִין לְמַרְדֵּכָי וְחַמַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכְכָה.</p>
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We meet Charvona earlier in the Megillah, but there he is one of Achashveirosh’s seven ministers given the task of calling Vashti to appear before the party:

<p><b>2. Esther 1:10</b>                  On the seventh day, when the king’s heart was merry with wine, he said to Mehuman, Bizta, Charvona, Bigta, Avagta, Zetar, and Charkas, the seven servants ministering before King Achashverosh.</p>	<p><b>אסתר א:י</b>                  בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כְּטוֹב לֵב הַמֶּלֶךְ בֵּינָם אָמַר לְמַהוּמָן בִּזְתָּא חַרְבוֹנָא בִּגְתָּא וְאַבְגְתָּא זֵטָר וְכַרְכַּס שֶׁבַעַת הַסֵּרִיסִים הַמְשַׁרְתִּים אֶת פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ.</p>
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Note the slight difference between the two references. In the earlier verse חרבונא is spelled with an Aleph and in the later one, where he suggests killing Haman, חרבונה is spelled with a Hei (Harav Chaim Kanievsky, שליט"א, notes the halachic convention for Hebrew names to end in ה, and non-Hebrew ones to end in א). This subtle difference, along with how shocking it is for a normal minister to make such a radical suggestion as killing the empire’s second in command, might have motivated the following Midrash to give us a new perspective on Charvonah’s identity:

<p><b>3. Esther Rabbah 10:9</b>                  Haman heard this and his face became sullen. What did Eliahu, remembered for the good, do? He impersonated Charvonah and said, “My master the king. Behold the wooden gallows that Haman prepared for Mordechai ...” For Rabbi Pinchas said, “One must say [in the prayer following the Megillah reading] ‘Charvonah is remembered for the good.’”</p>	<p><b>אסתר רבה י:ט</b>                  ושמע המן הדבר הזה ונפלו פניו. מה עשה <b>אליהו זכור לטוב</b>? נדמה לחרבונה ואמר לו, "אדוני המלך: גם הנה העץ אשר עשה המן למרדכי וגו'." דא"ר פנחס: צריך לומר "חרבונה זכור לטוב."</p>
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This gives us a simple explanation for calling him חרבונה זכור לטוב; for Charvonah is none other than the prophet Eliahu, often referred to as אליהו זכור לטוב. Here is the source for our custom:

<p><b>4. Masechet Sofrim 14:6</b>                  After that we praise the righteous: “Blessed is Mordechai, blessed is Esther, blessed are all of Israel.” Rav said, “One must say, ‘Cursed is Haman and cursed are his sons.’” Rabbi Pinchas said, “We must say, ‘Charvonah is remembered for the good.’”</p>	<p><b>מסכת סופרים יד:ו</b>                  ואחר כך מקלס לצדיקים: "ברוך מרדכי, ברוכה אסתר, ברוכים כל ישראל." רב אמר: צריך לומר "ארור המן וארורים בניו." אמר רבי פנחס: צ"ל "חרבונה זכור לטוב."</p>
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The angel Michael pushed Haman onto Esther's bed (Esther Rabbah 10:9 and Megillah 16a), but Eliahu was chosen to suggest Haman's hanging. Why Eliahu? Perhaps this foreshadows his participation in the final redemption when all evil will be eradicated.

## B. Charvonah is Charvona

The Gemara seems to take a radically different approach to Charvonah's identity:

<p><b>5. Megillah 16a</b> Even the evil Charvonah was part of [Haman's] plot. When he saw that his plan would not work he immediately fled. This is referred to in the following verse: "He cast him off and had no mercy. He fled from him in the wind" (Iyov 27:22).</p>	<p><b>מגילה טז.</b> אף חרבונה רשע באותה עצה היה. כיון שראה שלא נתקיימה עצתו מיד ברח. והיינו דכתיב "וַיִּשְׁלַךְ עָלָיו וְלֹא יִחַמְלֵם מִיָּדוֹ בְּרוּחַ יִבְרָח" (איוב כז:כב).</p>
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Charvonah, says the Gemara, was one of Haman's cohorts who "jumped ship" when he saw that Haman's plans were foiled. Rashi explains the Gemara's prooftext – loyalty has its limits:

<p><b>6. Rashi on Iyov 27:22</b> "He fled from him in the wind" – his cohort, who originally aided him, fled from helping him out at the time of his stumbling, just as Charvonah did to Haman.</p>	<p><b>רש"י על איוב כז:כב</b> "ברוח יברח" - בן עצתו שהיה מסייעו בתחלה יברח מעזור ידו בשעת כשלונו כמו שעשה חרבונה להמן.</p>
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One point is unclear about the Gemara's explanation. If Charvonah actually ran away, who made the suggestion to kill Haman? Does the Gemara also assume that Charvonah is Eliahu? Suggestion: Perhaps he metaphorically fled from destruction by suggesting Haman's execution. The Targum Sheni on the Megillah makes it clear that Charvonah himself made the suggestion to hang Haman:

<p><b>7. Targum Sheni on Esther 7:9</b> Charvonah, one of the servants of the king, said ... This Charvonah is in general remembered negatively, but for the following he is remembered positively: He was part of Haman's plot to hang Mordechai. When he saw that the misfortune that would befall Haman and his household he went himself and said to the king, "You can trust me that you can send a messenger to see the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordechai – who spoke positively on behalf of the king. It stands in Haman's house, fifty cubits tall." The king responded and said to Mordechai, "Hang him on it."</p>	<p><b>תרגום שני על אסתר ז:ט</b> ואמר חרבונא הד מן סריסאי קדם מלכא ... והא חרבונא דכיר לבישתא. אלא, על <b>הדא דכיר לטב</b>, מטול דעם המן הוה בעיצתא די נסיב (עצתא) למיעבד צליבא למרדכי וכד חמא דשלמא בישתא על המן ועל בייתיה אזל אף הוא לגרמיה ואמר ליה למלכא. אוף לך מהימנת לי שדר וחזי ית צליבא דעבד המן למרדכי דמליל טבתא על מלכא. והא קאי בביתיה דהמן רומיה המשין אמין עני מלכא ואמר למרדכי צליב יתיה עלוי.</p>
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Charvonah, according to the Targum Sheni, is still remembered positively for bringing about Haman's end – even though all he seemed interested in was saving his own skin. Charvonah the evildoer's ability to pull himself out of Haman's plot at the last minute is remembered for all generations.

## PURIM'S LAUGHTER BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

[Based on a shiur by Rabbi Fyvel Shuster on Topic 9 of Pachad Yitzchak – Purim, by Harav Yitzchak Hutner, זצ"ל (1906-1980, the Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivah Chaim Berlin).]

Laughter is such an important component of Purim. But excessive laughter is frowned upon by the Gemara (Berachot 31a): "It is forbidden to fill our mouths with laughter in this world," based on the verse, "אז ימלא שחוק פינו" – "[Only] then (in the World to Come) will our mouths be full of laughter" (Tehillim 126:2). The Eliahu Rabbah commentary on the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 560) discusses two exceptions, שמחה של מצוה, the joy of doing a mitzvah, and being joyous on Purim. Our happiness can be complete in those two contexts; we can "fill our mouths with laughter." Rav Hutner notes that these are treated as two separate exceptions. Being joyous over a mitzvah could be permitted because it is not "this worldly" joy, but joy associated with the next world. Why, though, is Purim set aside as a separate type of permissible joy?

He answers based on a passage in the Gemara (Berachot 7b) that discusses whether the righteous can "pick a fight in this world" with רשעים, evildoers, who seem to be extremely successful. It refers to such a rasha as a רשע שהשעה משחקת לו, one whose fortune is smiling on him (literally, time laughs for him). The Gemara concludes that a complete tzaddik may pick a fight even with an extremely successful rasha. Though one explanation for this is that the complete tzaddik has enough merits to win such a struggle whereas a standard tzaddik does not, Rav Hutner probes further. Rav Hutner explains by taking a closer look at two kinds of laughter. Laughing around an evildoer can take two forms: laughter of flattery – הנופה – and laughter of scorn – לעג. One who is afraid of the evildoer or wants to benefit from him will laugh with him. An employee who doesn't think very highly of his boss will still laugh at his jokes even though he finds them silly, in bad taste, or not so humorous. But the inner content of that laughter of flattery is laughter of scorn. In a comic book the speech bubble would say "Ha ha ha ha," but it would be accompanied by a thought bubble that said, "What a stupid joke by such an obnoxious person."

The standard tzaddik sees the successful rasha's smiling fortune and assumes that for some unknown reason Heaven has chosen for this evildoer to prosper. He assumes he is watching, so to speak, Divine external flattery and internal scorn; and he must follow suit. But the complete tzaddik has a deeper vision. He sees that even the success of the rasha is accompanied by Divine scorn. He knows he is watching G-d lift up the rasha to bring about a crashing downfall. "The One Who sits in Heaven laughs; G-d mocks him" (Tehillim 2:4).

This is the story of the confrontation between Mordechai and Haman. Haman started out as a village barber (Megillah 16a), then experienced an almost supernatural rise to power. The king of a world empire made him second in command; wherever he went people bowed down to him. Yet he was evil and a Jew hater. He could be described as a רשע שהשעה לו משחקת לו, an evil person for whom everything seems to go extremely well, whose fortune is smiling. But Mordechai was a צדיק גמור; so he watched G-d mock and scorn this evildoer, and followed suit. Mordechai did not hesitate to contend with Haman with open antagonism. Mordechai would not bow or prostrate himself before Haman. On Purim all of Israel is referred to as עם מרדכי, the nation of Mordechai. On Purim we can view the success of the evildoers from Mordechai's perspective. The rasha's good fortune is not Divine flattery, but Divine scorn. Therefore, on Purim, we have special permission to fill our mouths with the joy.

**We mourn the tragic deaths of Simchah Damari, הי"ד, Yonatan Shor, הי"ד, Avraham Goldman, הי"ד, and all the victims of last week's terrorist attack.**

**We continue to pray for a רפואה שלימה for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.**

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam for men and Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the married couples' programme and the Pathways Israel and Pathways Plus programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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