

Session 38
Terumah – Purim is Coming
21 February 2021

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7T8bJ0Rt7I&feature=youtu.be>

Shalom fellowship, I don't know who organized this moment of prayer, but it's falling out exactly on the time of our live fellowship. Seemed like a spice cart that I couldn't ignore, so, I say why not? Let's join the world, whoever's praying with us together now, I have a feeling this is one of the most diverse, maybe one of the largest online gatherings for this time and so, may Hashem hear our prayers. <https://collive.com/sunday-jews-around-the-globe-will-unite-in-prayer-for-moshiach/>

Master of the universe, we the children of Israel alongside the righteous among the nations, all united around the world at this moment are calling out to you. Please accept our prayer with grace and kindness. We thank you for all your daily blessings that you bestow upon us, but in this moment, we ask you to hear our call and cry for redemption. We've gathered here in faith that one day a leader would be sent to us, Mashiach, to end our long exile and end all suffering and to bring healing and peace to the world. The world needs your Presence back in this Land. The world needs your Presence in Jerusalem. Your face has been hidden for so many years and now, as we approach Purim, we ask You for the eyes to see that Your Presence is being restored. Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad. And our fellowship among all of Israel and around the whole world said, Amen.

Alright, that's not bad. The call is getting louder. I mean we're slowly coming together, slowly pumping up the volume. I don't know how many times there's been a worldwide call for prayer, Mashiach and redemption. I mean, may these gatherings continue, may the volume get louder and louder. Alright, you know, why not. Let's go. You know. I just...it's so good to see everyone here today. You know it's like a little bit of a marker. You know I can't believe this week is Purim. You know Purim is when corona hit Israel, it's like we put our masks on at Purim and then we just kind of kept them on and we never took them off for the whole year. It's like a full cycle now of this new world. This corona world, and you know the climax of the story of the Megillah is when Esther takes upon herself to go to the King. She says, go and unite all the Jews and have them fast for me for three days. That assembly, that unity, that coming together was key for the transformation. And how lucky we are to be able to gather an assembly of believers from all around the world in these times. It's like our small step of act. Our act of faith, our fellowship, our prayer.

And so, let's learn Torah together. You know, before we dive into this fellowship, I want to give an overview of what we're about to learn. And it's the story of Esther and in just a few minutes, Aish HaTorah made just a great video that'll serve our purposes here. Aish.com, it's a great online resource for Torah study and this video is just a great overview for those that are

new to Purim and for those that want a quick refresher before we go deep into the holiday. So here is the story. The Purim story in less than four minutes.

https://www.aish.com/v/ho/Purim_Animated.html

The Purim holiday takes us back to a time in history when genocide against the Jews was attempted, some twenty four hundred years ago. It marks the Jewish people's rescue from the plot of Haman, a high officer of the Persian empire and adviser to King Ahashvarosh. Haman's rage was incited by a single Jew, Mordechai, who refused to bow before him. Rather than seeking revenge against Mordechai alone, Haman plotted against the entire Jewish people. Haman gained permission from the King Ahashvarosh to do as he pleased against the Jews. He legislated the pogrom that would wipe out every Jew in the empire on a single blood-soaked day. Haman cast lots to determine the day when he and his minions would destroy the Jews.

In leaving the state entirely to chance, Haman's message was unmistakable. The Jews who believed in the providence of a beneficent God would be subject to the blind whim of fate. A casual roll of the dice would be the instrument that seals their end, while the God of the Jews would stand helplessly by.

Haman's challenge came at a crucial point in history. His provocations were a test. Was God still relevant in the post-Biblical age when open miracles were no longer common and prophecy was coming to an end? In the end the Jews were saved from Haman's plot, but pointedly, they were saved in a non-miraculous way. In the events of Purim, serendipitous happenings conspired to bring about unexpected results. Alone, each of these events could be seen as nothing more than a fortuitous coincidence, but taken together, they weave a miraculous chain of events orchestrated by God.

King Ahashvarosh held a spectacular six-month feast in the capital city of Shushan. It just so happens that when Queen Vashti refuses to obey the king, he has her eliminated and when a global beauty contest is held to replace her, it just so happens that Esther, a Jewish girl is chosen. When palace guards plot to assassinate the King, Mordechai, Esther's relative happens to overhear and foil the plot. One night, it just so happens that the king can't fall asleep, he asks for the book of records which just so happens to open to the page recording Mordechai's long-forgotten act of loyalty. At that moment, Haman happens to approach the King for permission to hang Mordechai. Instead, Ahashvarosh tells Haman to dress Mordechai in the royal robes and parade him on horseback through the streets of Shushan.

The heroics of Mordechai and Esther was in recognizing God's hand and taking the necessary action. No matter how challenging it may be. When Esther fears approaching the King uninvited, because one could be killed for such presumptuousness, Mordechai tells her it is certain that the Jewish people will be saved one way or another. God promised it will never be

destroyed. The only question Esther, is if you will rise to the challenge God has given you enabling redemption to come through your hand. This is your big moment. The reason for which you were born. At the climactic moment, Esther hosts a banquet where she reveals that she is Jewish and exposes Haman for planning genocide against her people. The King is shocked and orders Haman to be hanged on the very same gallows he prepared for Mordechai.

Ahashverosh grants the Jews the right to defend themselves on the 13th of the month of Adar, the day of the planned attack. The Jews defeat their enemies, including Haman's ten sons who, like their father before them, are hanged on the gallows. Mordechai enacts an annual holiday with feasting, giving gifts to poor and food to friends. Appropriately the holiday is called Purim, literal lots that are cast, commemorating how Haman's world view that everything is determined by chance was overturned by the Jewish ideal that God is present.

Chekhov once said that if a rifle lies above the mantle in act one of a play it had better go off by act three. The mark of a good playwright is that no plot element is superfluous. Everything ultimately has a role and the same goes for the great playwright in the sky. Everything we humans do has its role in the play we call life. But not necessarily in the way we imagine. The book of Esther does not mention the name of God and that's the whole point. The message of Purim is that God is here, even when He doesn't seem to be. God's Presence in history is felt not just when the sea splits or when Divine fire descends upon a mountain in full view of the entire nation. God is present in the everyday workings of life and history as well. We all have choices to make, that is how we cast our lots in life. But what happens after we make the choice is no longer up to us.

Purim demonstrates that God is in complete control, even when He remains behind the scenes. Without the fanfare of miracles in the space between human choice and the ultimate result, the Master of the Universe will yet have His say. (end of video)

All right, so with that background, we're going to start. I'm going to invite Ari to lay the foundations for this fellowship session and I know that what he has to say is going to make the holiday real in our lives, meaningful for us today. He's going to lay the groundwork, the foundations and then we're going to build on top of that from there. So right off the bat, Ari, please!

Ari

Shalom my friends. This coming Friday is the 14th of Adar, the holiday of Purim. I've heard people say that Purim is like a Jewish Halloween and it pains me to hear such things because I cannot imagine a comparison that would be further from the truth. Whereas Halloween is an empty pagan holiday, Purim is arguably the holiest and deepest holiday on the Jewish calendar. As I've touched on in our past fellowships, the Jewish people have a unique relationship with the calendar and with time. From the Western perspective, time progresses linearly, yet from

the Torah perspective, time ascends like a helix of repeating patterns and cycles which are illuminated by the Biblical root at the foundational level of the spiral of time. And so, while we spend our lives trying to internalize the truth that the nature of this world is a mask behind which Hashem is orchestrating everything, we have an opportunity on Purim to see the world and to see our lives through what I call Purim eyes and to take those eyes with us to the rest of the year.

Okay, so how do we see the world through Purim eyes? Well, I would say that the first step is to look into the book of Purim, Megillat Esther. What does Megillat Esther mean? Yes, the simple translation is the book, the megillah of Esther, but the deeper and more profound meaning is to reveal. Esther means hidden, to reveal the hidden. So, we open the megillah and the first thing we see is that which differentiates the megillah from every other book in the Tanakh is that Hashem's Name is not mentioned, even once. Yet, it's clear to us that Hashem is behind the scenes of the entire story, orchestrating every single thing from start to finish.

So the Mishna brings down that one of the best known laws of the Megillah is the reading on Purim. And the law is that you cannot read the Megillah le mafreia. Le mafreia, if you read it le mafreia, you do not fulfill your obligation. Now le mafreia literally means out of order, meaning for example that if you show up late, and get there while they're reading the second chapter and you hear until the end of the megillah from the second chapter, you cannot just go to another reading and hear the first chapter that you missed. If you do this, it's out of order and it doesn't count. You've not fulfilled your obligation to hear the entire megillah.

Rabbi Avram Sutton shares a teaching from the Ba'al Shem Tov which illuminates the seemingly abstract law to reveal the most profound truth about Purim and about our world. The Ba'al Shem Tov reveals the deeper level of this law. If one reads the Megillah le mafreia, thinking that it is about a story that happened a long way back in time, and doesn't realize that it's happening right now, he's missed the point of the entire thing. And it's not kosher.

Purim eyes pierce through the veil of multiplicity, through this illusion of duality. And when we strip it all away, we see the most foundational truth. That Hashem is running the entire show and that everything that is playing out before our eyes, however scary, and unpredictable it may seem and feel. When we realize that it's being orchestrated by Hashem for our own redemption and salvation, it is then, that we are looking at the world with Purim eyes. And there's a lot on the line because if we view the world as disjointed and disconnected, as a series of happenstance coincidences, then we're like a dog that is getting beaten by a stick. What does the dog do? He bites at the stick.

If we don't take advantage of the profound spiritual potential available to us, if we don't recognize that the events of our lives, both personal and national are being orchestrated from above, orchestrated with challenges perfectly tailored for us to grow in exactly the ways we

need to grow. Well, then, we may end up wasting our lives, biting at the stick and squandering the golden opportunity for growth which is the very purpose for which we're put here in this world. To grow.

The midrash tells us that in the Megillah, every mention of the name Hamelek Ha'ashverosh, refers to the King, but every time the Megillah says only the word Melech, it is a double meaning. It refers to Ha'ashverosh, but it also refers to Hashem. So every time we see Ha'ashverosh in the Megillah and in our lives, it is our job to see right through him and to know that he has no true independent power or agency. That we are seeing and dealing with Hashem, Himself.

Nachmanadis, the Ramban, explains the mitzvah of dvakut, of cleaving to Hashem involves constantly remembering His love and not allowing our thoughts to be distracted from Him. Not when we walk on the way nor when we lie down to sleep nor when we rise up, to the extent that even when we speak with people or engage in mundane conversation, our heart is not with them only, rather we are standing before Hashem. Attaining such a lofty level, the Ramban explains, one is considered bound up in the bundle of life. And it's then that we become a dwelling place for the Shekinah.

Rav Sutton brings the words of his Rebbe Rav Ephraim Rottenberg HaLevi who quotes the second chapter of the book of Nehemiah. When Nehemiah went before the King of Persia, the king noticed that he was sad. Chapter 2, verse 2 – and the king said to me, why is your face sad seeing you're not ill? There's nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very much afraid and I said to the king, let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' graves lies in ruins and its great gates have been consumed by fire? Then the king said to me, for what do you make a request? So I prayed to the God of Heaven and I said to the king, if it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight that you would send me to Judea, to the city of my father's graves that I may rebuild it.

Meaning that while in the physical world, it looked like Nehemiah was speaking to the King of Persia, in his heart, he was speaking to the God of Israel. This is what Avraham did when he spoke to Avi Melach, to Ephron the Hittite and to Pharaoh. This is what Ya'akov did when he spoke to Esav and to Shechem and to Pharaoh. This is what Moses did when he spoke to Pharaoh and this is what Esther did when she spoke to Ahashvarosh. They were each speaking through that person to God himself and thus the depth behind the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who Jeremy has quoted before, who said a religious man is a person who holds God and man in one thought at one time, at all times, who suffers harm done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair, who holds God and man in one thought at one time.

It's not a word play, it's quite literally true. As God is within each and every one of us. Purim eyes means that we're able to see both Haman and Mordechai as both God's emissaries.

Our sages tell us that Haman's seal was able to accomplish what 70 prophets were not, meaning that the prophets of Israel were sent by God to arouse the Jewish people to do tshuva, to repent, but they were most often not heeded. They weren't listened to, they weren't successful, but then along comes the evil Haman and he places his seal on the royal edict and he caused the Jewish people to actually repent. Haman was able to do arguably what Isaiah the prophet was not. Although bringing the Jewish people to repentance was quite definitely not his intention, that's what ended up happening.

So, if we recognize that everything and everyone is from God and God is working through both Haman and Mordechai, then what makes Mordechai closer to God and Haman far from God is both of them are totally immersed in the all-encompassing oneness of God. Ain ode milvado. There's nothing other than God. The answer, my friends, is that in the spiritual world, you're close to something when you are similar to it and you are far from something when you're distant from it. So, while Haman was like a mirror that the divine light bounced off of to enter the world, Mordechai was a funnel. A vehicle which God harnessed to illuminate the earth. This is the secret, perhaps of one of the deepest verses in the Megillah. When Esther was concerned to appear before the king out of fear that she would lose her life, Mordechai said redemption and salvation will come to the Jews, but will it be through you? It will come, Mordechai explained, but this was the moment for Esther to decide. Would it be through her?

Hashem, this Purim, shine your divine light into our hearts and give us the gift of Purim eyes. Eyes that allow us to see and know that all of the confusing events in our world and in our lives are from you. Allow us not to reread the Megillah la mafreia as if it were out of order, but to know that just as Haman was hung on the very tree that he erected to hang Mordechai, that the nuclear weapons Iran is building to destroy us will be their own fate. Allow us to trust in You and not to fear. And please Hashem, give us the courage to rise to the occasion during these difficult times so we can be like Queen Esther. Vessels through which you shine your light of redemption and salvation into the world. Thank you, my friends. Purim Sameach. Back to you, Jeremy.

Jeremy

Thank you, Ari, that was absolutely spectacular. You are such a beautiful person. Having Purim eyes, I love that. Having Mashiach eyes, I think that's a gift that's worth working towards. And so, you know, I feel like Purim this year means so much. It means so much that it's kind of shutting me down. And I'm just like, ok, I'm just taking steps toward the day. Hoping to receive as much as I can from the blessings that Purim has to offer. But I just can't help but connect the fact that last year was when Purim really hit Israel. It's like last Purim, we started wearing masks all year round. It was like Purim every day here in this crazy country. It's like wow, I feel

like you can't ignore that. It's like hard to process that we've been living in this corona world for a year from Purim until Purim. But now, this Purim, something is changing now. And so you know, it's like Purim in some ways is the last holiday of the year. In the Biblical counting, Nissan is the first month. Passover is the first holiday and Adar is the last month. So, Passover is the first holiday. It's like we've worked all the way from Passover all the way through this. In some ways, the years build up to Purim and you know the Bible all builds up towards Purim. It's the last book to enter into the canon of the Hebrew Bible. It's the last message given to us in the Hebrew Bible.

So, everyone knows that the holiest day of the year is Yom Kippur, but the Hebrew tells us that Kippur literally means a day that's like Purim. It's like Purim is the real deal, Yom Kippur, that's just a day that's like Purim. It's almost as high in some ways. Purim is like the climax of Biblical living and that's what we're going to explore this session. It's like how can Purim, in understanding this scroll of Esther, bring blessing into our lives this year? And maybe kind of take off the mask, if not from us, then from the Master of the Universe and give us a little bit of clarity on what's going on here.

So, let's start the old-fashioned Jewish way. Let's ask a question. Why is this holiday called Purim? And it's not like a Jewish tradition that unfolded that we decided to call it Purim. Mordecai, the author of the Megillah tells us the name of the holiday in Scripture so we know what to call it. We know what to remember to call it. Just why Purim? Why is it called that name? What does that name mean? So let's look at what the Megillah has to say in Chapter 9 verses 24-26:

For Haman son Hammedatha the Agagite, enemy of all the Jews, had plotted to annihilate the Jews and had cast a PUR, which is the GORAL, to terrify and to annihilate them... Therefore, they called these days "Purim" from the word Pur.
- Esther 9:24,26

Okay, Haman plotted to annihilate the Jews. Why is this holiday named after the enemy? That's pretty weird. It's the only holiday in the Bible that we're actually like commemorating the bad guy. What's that about? And it's not only the enemy we're commemorating, the vehicle the enemy used to try to destroy Israel. The pur, that lottery. That is just bizarre. That's unique, it's outstanding, it's unprecedented in the Biblical tradition. In Jewish tradition, we've never done that. Why are we commemorating the bad guy or the vehicle to the bad guy? We don't call Passover the Nile because Paro used the Nile to try to cast our baby boys

into it. It's like, what is that about? We commemorate the pur, the lottery, the chance the dice that Haman used to try to destroy the Jews?

Okay, one more question. Why do we call the day Purim? It should be called Pur, but the holiday's name says Purim. That's plural in Hebrew. Why are they doubling down on the lottery? Why are there two? There weren't two lotteries in the story. So, we could have called the holiday Pur. No, no, we call it Purim, which is a very peculiar name. It's as if there are multiple lotteries going on here.

All right, so let's review. Question number one. Why is the name of our holiday commemorating the enemy? Question number two, why is the name called on behalf of the vehicle that our enemy Haman used? And question number three, if you're already to commemorate the Pur, why is the holiday called Purim which means lots? Why is the name of our holiday plural?

If we can answer those three questions, we are going to get into something really deep. All right, so let's go. Question number one. Why is the holiday commemorating our enemy? So we gotta think about that. Clearly, it's for us to understand the holiday meaning if we need to understand, commemorate, get into the mind of the enemy, then that's giving us the key to really understanding the holiday. Passover and Pharaoh, I got it. We were slaves, we needed liberation. Here Purim is something different. Haman is something totally different. We need to understand the enemy here if we're really to understand the celebration and understand the meaning in the heart in the message of the story.

So let's explore this more. What is Haman? Who is he? What is he about? So it says that he's an Agagite. He's from the lineage of King Agog, the King of Amalek, who was defeated by King Saul before the rise of King David in the Bible. He's the King of the Amalekites that Saul was commanded to eliminate and Saul failed. And almost a thousand years later, Amalek has his revenge and a new king, the minister of the Amalekites is Haman.

All right, so now we know if we're going to understand Haman, we need to understand Amalek, Israel's arch enemy. And so, let's look at the first time we encounter Amalek in the Torah. It happens right after the people of Israel cross the Red Sea. Moses calls Joshua to assemble an army and they go fight which is peculiar because they didn't need to fight with an army against Egypt. This war was different. It's like, when Moses was on the mountain and his hands were raised up toward heaven, Israel would prevail and when Moses's hands were down, Israel would lose. Clearly this battle is not just a simple battle. It involves every single Israelite and it's clearly a spiritual battle. It's not about land and it's not about countries. This is a battle of the spirit, from the get-go.

Look at Exodus, Chapter 17:4. This is what it says after the battle:

Hashem said to Moses, "Write this as a remembrance in the Book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I shall surely erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." Moses built an altar and called its name "Hashem is My miracle" and he said, "For the hand is on the throne of God; Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation."

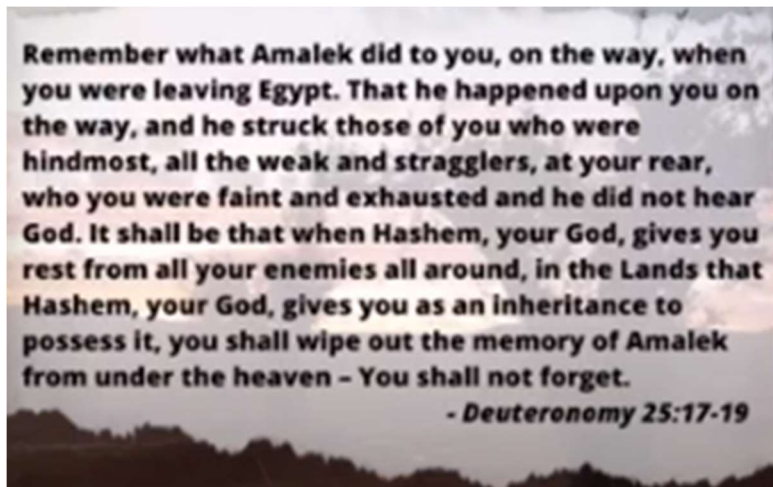
- Exodus 17:14

There's a lot to say here, but for now, I want to point out just a few things. Amalek arrives in this battle right after the people begin to doubt. In the verse right before the battle, they actually ask, is God, is Hashem among us or not? As if the doubt triggered the war and Amalek's hand is on the throne of God from generation to generation. I mean, this a spiritual war, this is a war until the end of times. It's like until a new consciousness, a new era arrives for humanity, this battle of Israel and Amalek, this spiritual war is going to be fought.

And there's an old Judean tradition that teaches the numerical value of the Hebrew word Amalek is the same numerical value of the word sufek, which is doubt. Can we show that on the screen here? These are the letters. Each letter in Hebrew receives a number that's in Gematria and we see here that somehow Amalek and sufek, which means doubt are the same number:

		70 - ו
	60 - ט	40 - ה
240	80 - פ	30 - ל
	100 - ק	100 - ק

Now what that's teaching us is that Amalek first appeared in Israel's moments of doubt, but their name is integrally associated with doubt itself. It's like, wait a minute here. Now, we're really getting into what this battle is about. We're actually battling disbelief. A nation that lived by doubt who idealizes doubt, who lives by disbelief, who lives by chance...oh, by chance. Now we might have a little insight into why we're calling this holiday Purim. It's pointing us to what this holiday is all about. Now this Shabbat there's a mitzvah to read the Torah portion, this section of the Torah, right before Purim. The portion where we're commanded to remember Amalek in Deuteronomy Chapter 25 verses 17-19. Look at what it says:



This section of the Torah read on Shabbat along with the Parsha before Purim, it's like all the women, all the children gather together. You shall not forget. And the people of Israel, 3,000 years later, this stiff-necked people. We gather every year and read it, not to forget. And so, what I want you to notice though, is this amazing thing about the text. And it gives us a real clue into Purim. Look at how Amalek appears in the Torah. It says that he happened upon us on the way. It's just like he just happened upon us, you know this whole thing is just random anyway. There's like a random virus that just happened to appear in the world, there's this random nation that just happened upon us on the way.

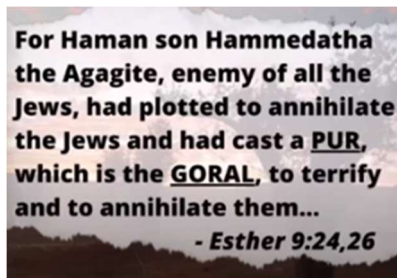
And there are two dimensions that are brought down to help us understand what that word means. One, *korcha* literally means *mikre*, it's just a chance. It happened upon you on the way. It's random. They just kind of showed up out of nowhere. They're the enemy of chance, so you think God is guiding you out of Egypt. I don't know how you got out, but there's nothing special about you, Israel. I'll prove it to you. Watch. I'll attack you. And they hurt us. They hurt us hard.

You know, where was God when Amalek attacked? When Moses's hands were up, Israel won, but then there were times when his hands were down and Amalek won. I mean they struck our children and our elderly. God calls to take care for the children, the orphan, the weak, the widow. Amalek came and attacked what God...who God seems to care for most. And now, from a place of like *emunah* and like trusting in God, crossing the sea. Amalek came and made things look pretty chaotic and random. It just sort of happened. It's like, wait a minute. What about providence? I mean the Hebrew verse brings another meaning to the word *Korcha*, happened. Can we put it up on the screen for a second?



Korcha means happened upon you, but it also means to make you cold. Literally, means cold, to cool you off. The people of Israel, they should have been on fire. They just defeated the mightiest empire in the world without lifting a finger. They literally crossed the sea. Everything was on their side. God was guiding them in their lives. They saw God's great hand, like we all have seen God's hand in our lives. And then in comes Amalek and cools off the fire. 30:30

The enemy of Amalek isn't really about the nation. The nation isn't a forbidden nation. An Amalekite can convert and join the nation of Israel. I mean, according to Biblical law, it's better to be an Amalekite to join Israel, than a Moabite like Ruth. There's nothing about annihilating the nation as a nation. It's a war with what that nation represents in the world. And it's a battle in every generation and a hand grabbing at the throne of God. Every year before Purim we gather and we remember what Amalek did. Amalek weakened us. It weakened our minds, it weakened our spirit. It's like never forget that. Our job is to overcome the doubts and overcome the fears. And now, we're getting somewhere, because look at what the Megillah says about the holiday again. This is in Chapter 9:24 and 26:



That's the war of Amalek and his pur. His ultimate expression of chance and coincidence. It's like Amalek is the idea of doubt, is the idea of chance. That's why he chose the date by a lottery. It's like total chance. Look at what Scripture says. It wasn't just to annihilate us, it was to terrify us. It was like an amazing psychological warfare. He's trying to destroy, not only the Jewish body, but the Jewish spirit. I mean, this holiday in salvation is all about the pur, and Haman in his lottery was saying Jews, you think there's a transcendent truth, a reality beyond our reality that guides this world? I'm gonna roll the dice with your life and through absolute chance annihilate you and your God, showing you and the world there's nothing beyond random chance in this world. And that's actually the meaning of the King of Amalek, Agag. Can we put that up on the screen?



Ag is the name of the king of Amalek and it comes from the word Gag, which means roof. And what does that mean? That means that in the eyes of Amalek, their king, there's nothing beyond. There's a roof that seals in this world. This world is a closed reality. It's similar to like the new science, atheist reductionists. You know they claim there's only physical. There's nothing beyond the roof of the physical. There's no spirit. There's no soul. There's no god. It's just all matter here and we humans, we're just mutated mud that is randomly evolved with no reason. Our thoughts are random neuronal firings, just chaos. It's all chance. It's all meaningless. There's no master in this world and if I, Haman, can rise to power and stand on the roof above the rest, I'll have control.

Haman thought if you have the money, the political power, the control, you could be the master of the world. Why not? How powerfully does this speak to us right now with politicians and countries and big tech and pharma? All of them vying for power. So many forces, so many people. Maybe some of them working together. Some of them standing alone, all of them want to stand on the roof and think they have control. They think to themselves, man, after this reset, who's going to be the master of the new world? Little do they know that there is a much bigger plan that's unfolding here. See the lesson of Haman is eternal from generation until generation until the coming of Mashiach. That's the final revelation and it's never been more true. I mean, and who is the Savior, one of the coolest ladies to ever exist.

You need to fall in love with Queen Esther. You have to. One of the greatest characters in the Bible, if you haven't fallen for her at least a little bit, it means you haven't really read the story right, because it says she had so much grace, so much grace, beauty, charm, and charisma that everyone that met her sort of fell a little bit in love with her. And I know it's like, I'm not sure why we love what we love. In some cases what we love is a blessing. In some cases, it's a curse. I love sweet things. I really like sugar. I know that that's a curse, but I love the Bible. I love the Bible and that is like the greatest blessing in my life. The characters in the Bible, they're my heroes, they're my role models. I think about them, I dream about them.

The magic of the Bible for me is that when we need it most, the book delivers a transcendent message of meaning and guidance directly to us through the ancient words of the prophets. Like somehow, miraculously, these old texts become a living word. Like magic they continue to

give us guidance in the hardest of times. In the best of times. There's just no other book like it on the planet.

But to really get into the Bible, you have to really get into the character, so look at Queen Esther this time. The last Savior of the Hebrew Bible. Mordecai tells her, listen, the fate of all of Israel is in your hands and Esther rises to the challenge. She knows that her life is on the line, coming before the king without permission, especially after his assassination attempt is punishable by death. And she ends up saying the eternal words, it's like, if I perish, I perish. I mean, clearly at that moment, she's scared, but that's real courage. Going in not fearful at all, there's no bravery there. Bravery is when you're scared and you still choose to make the right choice.

You know Confucius, a Chinese philosopher once said we have two lives and the second one begins when we realize we only have one. And Esther, alongside all the Jews has to face her death. She has to really think about her life. And how does she want to live and if she has to, how does she want to die? And then Esther goes into solitude for three days. She prays, she thinks, she plans. And you've seen like the great training scenes, like iconic Rocky Balboa movies. It's like the big fight in their training and like the music is pumping and it's like that's how I imagined those three days. It was three days of spiritual, mental, psychological training and preparation. I fast every so often. I've never fasted for three days. For three days, Esther trains and after day three, she's unstoppable. She's ready. She is in the zone.

You know Haman, continuing Amalek's mission, you know tried to terrify Israel. And Esther starts off scared saying, if I perish, I perish, but after these days, she's fearless now. There's an ancient African saying that I just learned that says, when there's no enemy within, the enemy outside you can do no harm. For three days any enemy that was inside Esther's mind, she dealt with, and then she cleared her mind and then she was ready. And how do I know? How do I know that she was fearless? You just have to read the story. Esther goes in like a laser, like while everyone is just kind of living their lives doing their thing, Esther, like a chess master playing the board has already planned out five steps ahead of everyone else. It's like Bruce Lee, you know, one of the most respected fighters and athletes, said, the successful warrior is the average man with laser focus.

And after three days of fasting meditating, thinking, and planning, Esther is exactly that. She was just an average girl. She's orphaned at a young age. Mordecai brought her in. She grew up, I guess, with Mordechai as her role model. But now, like a laser, she is full aligned with God and with that power, she becomes a hero. And that's why we fast before Purim. It's like then the Bible isn't just a book that we read. It's like no, no, we get to experience it just a little bit. The day before Purim, we taste a little bit of Queen Esther's journey toward greatness and salvation. It's like we learn through her. It's like happiness. Faith is something that can be strengthened. Something that can be worked on. It's a state of mind. It waxes, it wanes.

You're stronger, you're weaker, but you can train. It's something you can develop. And Esther was building her state for three days straight.

And she walks into the King's hall, she's not radiating any fear at this point. She has chosen her best life. And there are no regrets when you do what you know is right. And then her chen, her beauty, her charm, her charisma, she's electrifying. Just seeing her, the king falls in love all over again. He hadn't seen her in 30 days. The king has countless women at his disposal, but Esther is so attractive, she's so captivating. He extends his scepter to her and tells her half of my kingdom is yours just like head over heels. Like there's no reason that he needs to say that and he's just like madly in love with Esther. Look at her and Esther tells him, listen, this is it. If she was fearful, she'd be like, listen...tell him about the Jewish people quickly. Tell him about Haman. You got the green light. Half the Kingdom is yours. Nope, she's so cool. She's teaching Amalek what a cool Jew really looks like. It's like you tried to cool us off. Let me show you what ice cool is.

And then she goes in and she's like, listen, what I really want is, I'd love to have a meal with Haman and the king. It's like oh, it's like brilliant. It's like every man who encountered Esther had a crush on Esther and she knows that that's a gift that she has from God. It's a special chen, a grace that she was given and she knew that Haman was no different. And having Haman drunk, all it took was a look from her in the right way when the King wasn't looking and then Haman would give off a liking of Esther. Maybe a flirt, a word, a look and all of a sudden, the king would be like, what is going on here? Wait a minute here. I mean this is Haman. This guy's someone that shouldn't be trusted necessarily.

And at that time, Haman was the king's most trusted minister. He had the king's ring. He made all the decisions. Whatever he said, it was like being the King. And Esther just in that first meal really chipped away at that trust. But then, she invited Haman and the king again for another festive meal. And at this point the king's like, wait a minute. What is going on here with Esther and Haman? Why does Haman keep on hanging out with my wife? What is going on here?

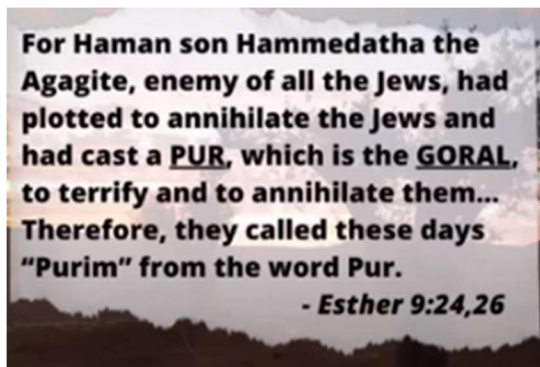
The second meal, it never made sense to me. For years, racking my brain, why the second meal? Why does she invite him for a second meal? What is that second meal all about? It just doesn't make any sense, like what is that?

And you know, it's like this second meal, it's like that's where Esther's greatness lies. She's so cool. She's looking at the ancient version of Adolf Hitler at her table. Fearless and she's toying with him for generations to enjoy and for generation to learn. The second meal, Haman oblivious. Haman you think all this is random? You think this is all just happenstance? You think this is chance? You think you have control? Look at what I'm doing to you right now. I've spun you entirely on my little finger. You have absolutely no control. You have no idea.

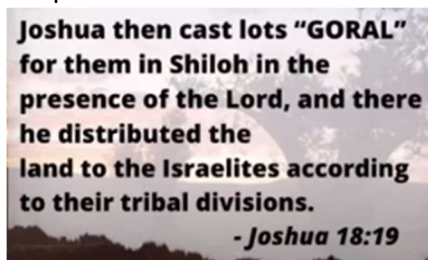
Nothing is random. A little old orphan girl like me has you entirely entrapped while you're feasting in your arrogance at my second meal.

The second meal is just to toy with Haman, just to entertain believers for centuries later. Watching the arrogant Haman who thinks he'll soon have the roof of power, not knowing he has no control over his life. That a little orphaned girl has totally taken control of the situation through her faith in God. He has no idea what's happening right before his eyes. You think there's no master of the world? A beautiful woman named Esther is showing you how small you really are. That's why we commemorate the holiday with a feast and wine. The second feast is everything. It's like, oh, my gosh, that's the essence of the holiday. It's like, fill my cup, it's Purim.

The third question. The holiday is Purim, it's plural because there's so much here. Now we can understand it. I mean, look at the celebration of chance. The celebration is knowing what the chance is. Look closely at the text that we started with now. Now the English always gets this wrong, so I tried to write it for you in Hebrew here. But look at what it says:



Which is the goral...that's an important word there. What does that mean? A pur which is a goral to terrify and to annihilate them? Therefore, they call these days Purim, from the word pur. He cast a pur which is the goral. Like what does that mean? There are two words here and now we're getting somewhere. It's plural, Purim, because there's two words here. What do those two words mean? Let's look at the words closely. We know the word goral from the book of Joshua. Joshua cast a goral to see how to divide the Land of Israel among the tribes. It was a kind of lottery, but it's a totally different kind of lottery. Look at what Joshua says in chapter 18:



Pur is a lottery. Goral is the exact opposite of chance. Goral in Hebrew means ordained. It literally means destiny, destined from above. Look at the verse again. Almost every English translation gets this wrong. Had cast a pur which is a goral – had cast a lot which is destiny. The greatest enemy of Israel from generation to generation is an idea. Is life random and meaningless? What Amalek saw as chance, Israel knew as destiny. The name Purim is plural to bring us to this exact distinction. The pur is the goral. What looks like chance is nothing less than destiny.

When Haman happened to dismiss Vashti, he brought in Esther thinking it was about him. When he said this is the way to honor the man who the king loves, he ends up honoring Mordechai and humiliating himself. Drawing a lot to kill all the Jews turned into the day when all the Amalekites were killed. Trying to break the spirit of the Jews. Not only did the Jews return to God in fasting and prayer, but many of the nations around left the pagan realities that they were attached to and became more Judean and more Biblical. It says that the nations of the land, the believers, started to become more Judean. They said, I'm leaving the pagan rituals and I'm going towards the Biblical. It's like Haman tried so hard to erase it and all he did was light up the world.

Haman and his sons tried so hard ultimately to stop the temple from being built in Jerusalem, you learn that from the book of Ezra, but it was Esther's son who Haman brought into the palace that enabled the building of the second temple. And the tree he prepared for Mordechai, oh that happened to be used just for him. It's like all these things that seemingly just happened by chance was nothing other than Biblical destiny and divine providence. The pur, the chance is the goral, is the destiny.

The last book of the Bible brings us all the way back to the greatest battle from generation to generation. This is how our relationship with God will be until the coming of Mashiach. And his hand is on God's throne. It's like we are fully in this world where we discover that the world is nothing other than God Himself. There is nothing other than Him. That's what the scroll of Esther means. Just like what Ari said, Megilat Esther, it means the scroll of Esther, but those words literally mean to reveal the hidden.



When we read the book of Esther, you reveal the hidden hand of God because it couldn't have been any other way. But the essence of the holiday is to see the chance and know that it's destiny. It's more than that.

Listen to what Rav Daniel, one of my dearest rabbis taught me a few years ago. It says all of a sudden, there's a woman savior. That's something so different in the Bible. Until then, it was almost always male saviors. What is that about? It's the final stage of redemption. See a father, if we see God as a father, well fathers come and go. They go out to work and then he comes home. And if the children are bad, the mom will say, oh you wait until your father comes home. I'm going to tell him what you've done and then the father comes home when things get chaotic. And then the father saves the day.

Like when the Jews are in distress, they cry out, God, come and save us. Then God was not there and now He is there and He comes and He saves the day. No, a new way to relate to God is a mother. She's always there. The Shechinah is the Divine Presence. It's a feminine word. The Divine Presence returning to Israel is that there's a mother that's always there, nursing the baby, always with the children. The final revelation will be that God doesn't come back and forth and leave and go and save us when we're in troubles and He's away. His Shechinah, like a mother is a constant presence, we will be given the eyes to see that what manifests in this world that looks like a random pur, like a random chance, is actually His goral, is actually His destiny.

It's like in our recent history, generations after Haman, a new Amalek rose in the form of Hitler to annihilate all the Jewish people once again. And you know you think about Amalek. It's just remarkable. Each time Amalek appears, he seems to rise up right before the Jewish people are returning to the Land of Israel. On our way from Egypt, we're like on our way to Israel, Amalek comes and attacks us. Here again, after the destruction of the first temple, we're on our way back to build the second temple. On our way back to Israel, Haman rises up again. And then again in our generation, as the Jewish people started returning to the Land of Israel and modern Zionism was born. Right before the rebirth of the state of Israel, Amalek manifests once again.

But today, now when the spirit of Amalek, the spirit of doubt, the spirit of fear creeps in, is this all just random? This virus, this world, these elections. What's going on here? The world need only to look at the Land of Israel and see the order in the chaos. The world need only to look at our fellowship of believers who are so beautifully aligned with Biblical destiny, walking out the vision of the prophets to see godly order in this world. And of course, that's the ultimate personal message. That is what Purim is really all about on a neshama level. Like for us, in our souls. If Israel has a destiny, all of us have a destiny.

Our thoughts are not random, neuronal firings. They're very well organized. I don't understand the scientists that say it's just random. Dreams aren't random either. It's not just static on a screen. There's a story to dreams. They're crazy, sometimes. But there is clear order. What's going on in our minds, our thoughts, our dreams, that's not random. That's not random.

What's happening, our lives, our deepest dreams, they're not accidental or meaningless. Our deepest dreams we can dream for ourselves. Those dreams are guides towards our best selves.

Like a member in this fellowship asked me just this week. It's like coming up on Purim, and he's like why can't we see God? And I said, that is just a great question. I think we can see God. Every time we take a step closer to becoming who we are meant to be, we experience a little closeness to God. In every act of kindness, we can see His ways in the world. You can see it's right there. That's why we're called to bring gift baskets and charity on Purim.

You want to see God? You want to reveal the hidden? You want a Megilat Esther? You can reveal Him by giving as He's giving, you can be giving. And the more giving you become, the closer you become to Him. The more giving person you become, in that process, growing toward becoming yourself, you encounter Him. You reveal Him. Biblical faith in its core from Abraham until today is looking at life as a reflection of God in the world. It's an image of God, but we're born with a long road to travel. Our souls, our potential, we're not even close to fully expressed.

But our goral, our destiny is to reflect the godliness that we have the potential to achieve in our lives. We only have one life to live and we want to live the best way that we can. Who we could become is our destiny and none of us have any idea how far that path might take us. Biblical faith in destiny, in goral, is what brought the idea of self-discovery, of self-actualization into the world. It's like, while aiming toward our highest ideal, by living out our values in challenging times. On that path of doing the right thing, overcoming our fears, overcoming our doubts.

Being like Queen Esther, we build ourselves, and when we aim toward our destiny, God's blessing and Presence manifests in our life. And that's what the Jewish mystic and poet Yehuda Halevi wrote... in my going out toward you, God, toward myself I found You. As we walk in the light of our own destiny, we discover that God is the actual light of our way. He's giving you the light and the inspiration to stay the course. You're becoming better as you're walking in that light. You're being empowered to be your best self. Who's giving you that inspiration toward yourself to find Him? You're literally being lit up by Him. You are Megilat Esther in your own life. That's why it's joy.

God wants our best lives and in living my best life, I'm going to reveal God in my life? When Jews bow down in prayer, it's only to rise up with more light. When we're called to carry a burden, it's only to make us stronger. That's why the people of Israel are so resilient. We are so strong, no nation could ever take us down. And the nations that become more Judean, they leave the Greek tragedy and the pagan lottery in chance and they join Biblical destiny.

That's why Purim is the ideal, the climax and that's why Purim is plural. Because the chance is the destiny and while the world around us may look chaotic, while powerful men and women may be scheming behind the scenes. Everything that unfolds is a part of Israel's destiny. And as we gather here around the world, Jerusalem's old city is preparing parking and public transportation for hundreds of thousands of visitors that are going to stream into the city once this coronavirus ends. Now think about that. The city of Jerusalem is preparing a way for hundreds of thousands of visitors to come from all over the world to stream to the old city of Jerusalem.

When doubt creeps in, keep your eyes towards Zion. Keep your eyes toward Jerusalem and see that His plan is being revealed. And if it's being revealed on the outside, it's also going to be revealed on the inside. In our lives. And so, all of you, may you have the most beautiful Purim. And there's a preparation for the holiday. We have a week to go. Increase your joy have fun, enjoy the feast. Smile, hug, a lot. Hugging is amazing. Hug everyone that you love a lot this week if that brings joy. It's all for the good. No fear. We're getting closer, and knowing that we're getting closer, sensing it, feeling it, knowing it. We're all getting closer to ourselves. We're all getting closer to Jerusalem. That's the path and like Esther we all, all, all can be heroes. And so know that through this fellowship, from this Land you are blessed from Zion.

Aaronic blessing