

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE?

When describing the outcome of the Purim miracle, the Megillah states: "For the Jews there was light, happiness, joy, and glory."

The Gemara explains: "Light refers to Torah; happiness refers to Yom Tov; joy refers to *milah*, circumcision; and glory refers to *tefillin*."

What is the connection of these four mitzvos to Purim? The commentators explain that Haman's decrees targeted these specific mitzvos, which symbolize the distinctness of the Jewish nation.

Therefore, these mitzvos are given special emphasis when describing the Purim miracle.

COMMON GROUND?

When choosing a sign of distinction to single out the Jewish nation, it would be logical to choose mitzvos that do not exist elsewhere. With these four mitzvos, however, we seem to share common ground with, *lehavdil*, the non-Jewish nations:

- Torah: Non-Jews can also appreciate the Torah's great wisdom.
- Yom Tov: They celebrate various days throughout the year as well.
- Milah: Many gentiles circumcise too (albeit for health reasons).
- Tefillin: Through wearing *tefillin*, a Jew is recognized as being part of Hashem's nation. Similarly, the members of many nations and groups wear an emblem or the like that indicates to which group he belongs.

Why were these mitzvos in particular chosen as signs of distinction, if they have counterparts with other nations?

A CHOSEN BODY

But this is just the point. What differentiates us is not only those areas that do not exist elsewhere, but even those that others seem to replicate. Nonetheless, a Jew approaches them in an entirely different manner.

This reflects Haman's general decree against the Jewish nation. He sought to destroy their bodies, not their souls, because he

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couldn't stand the fact that even a Jewish *body* is special. As the Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya, when we say in *davening*, "You have chosen us from all the nations," this cannot be referring to the soul. Only a Jew possesses a soul, and it cannot be said to have been *chosen*, which implies a selection from between two

similar entities. Rather, this refers to the Jewish body, which appears similar to every other human body, and yet it, too, is unique.

Similarly, Haman directed his decrees particularly toward those mitzvos that appear to exist by others as well. He couldn't handle the fact that even in these areas, a Jew stands out from the rest.

FEMININE TORAH

Let's examine these four mitzvos one at a time, and explore how the Jewish approach toward each one is unique.

Torah:

We find other references to Torah as *or*, the masculine term for light. In this *possuk*, however, the term used is *orah*, in the feminine.

What is the difference between *or* and *orah*?

The Torah is comprised of *torah shebichsav*, the Written Torah, and *torah shebaal peh*, the Oral Torah, which clarifies the laws hinted to in *torah shebichsav* and extrapolates new laws from those stated in *torah shebichsav*. *Torah shebichsav* is the "masculine" aspect of Torah, as it is the source of all the explanations of the Sages, and *torah shebaal peh* is the "feminine" aspect, sourced in and receiving from *torah shebichsav*. *Orah*, then, refers in particular to *torah shebaal peh*.

With regard to *torah shebichsav*, everyone recognizes that it is a sacred text given by Hashem, and no one would dare oppose or modify it based on his personal understanding. With *torah shebaal peh*, however, one might come along and say: "These

explanations and rulings are based on logic and human reasoning. Why must I accept the way our Sages understood it? I too have been blessed with intelligence, and I prefer a different explanation!"

This is what makes our approach to Torah unique. We approach even *torah shebaal peh*, the "logical" part of Torah, with *emunah*, putting our own understanding to the side and recognizing the explanations of the Mishnah and Gemara as being correct. (This further extends itself to later works of Torah that have been accepted among world Jewry.)

This is why *torah shebaal peh* is a sign of distinction, because it demonstrates our unique approach even to the "intellectual" part of Torah, which can be equally appreciated by non-Jews.

THREE MORE MITZVOS

Yom Tov:

Other nations celebrate as well, drinking wine and eating meat just as we do. However, the goal of their celebrations is to rejoice and be merry, while with our celebrations, the greater the joy, the greater the *yiras shamayim*. And the rejoicing of Purim, with all its limit-breaking qualities, leads to even greater levels of *yiras shamayim*.

Milah:

The Rambam explains in Moreh Nevuchim that the act of circumcising weakens a person's passion for material pleasures. This is why certain non-Jews circumcise. It is a painful act, but they are willing to undergo this pain to prevent even greater suffering, the suffering that can be caused by overindulging in physical pleasures.

With a Jew, by contrast, *milah* is a joyous activity ("joy refers to *milah*"). What is the joy involved in *milah*? Regarding *milah*,

the Gemara cites the *possuk*, "I rejoice over Your words like one who finds great spoils." Just as a person rejoices when acquiring the spoils of an enemy, a Jew rejoices upon having "looted" his enemy—the *yetzer hara*—from his passions, which is accomplished through *milah*. For a Jew, decreasing his material pleasures is actually a joyous accomplishment!

Tefillin:

A typical emblem is colorful and attractive, demonstrating the wearer's pride in belonging to a certain group. *Tefillin*, by contrast, are far from beautiful: they are black, and are formed from animal hide! Yet, a Jew is proud to wear *tefillin*. His pride lies not in the boxes' physical appearance, but in the fact that they contain pieces of parchment carrying the words of *Shema Yisrael*.

KEDUSHAH IS OUR ESSENCE!

Why is it that a Jew is distinct even in those areas that are shared by other nations?

If *kedushah* were to have been an added element of a Jew's existence, then it may have been limited to certain activities. But this is not the case: *kedushah* is part and parcel of a Jew's very existence. For this reason, it affects each and every part of him, even those features that others seem to possess as well.

This is what bothered Haman, leading him to strive to destroy not only these particular mitzvos, but the entire Jewish nation. His downfall led to a celebration that centered on these four mitzvos, which in turn bolstered every other area of Yiddishkeit as well.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 3, pp. 916ff.

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