

“תחת הנעצוץ יעלה ברוש ותחת הסרפד יעלה הדס” מרן ראש הישיבה הג”ר אהרן פלדמן שליט”א

The *Gemara* in י: מגילה lists a series of *pesichtos* which various *Amoraim* gave as introductions to *Megilas Esther*. R. Shmuel bar Nachmani gave the following *derasha* as his introduction:

The *posuk* reads, (ישעיהו נה, יג) “-“the *na’atzutz* will be supplanted by a *b’rosh*, and in the place of the *sirpod* will rise a *hadas*.” The *na’atzutz*, a thorn tree, refers to Haman because he made himself into an *avoda zara*, and another *posuk* in *Sefer Yeshayahu* (7:19) refers to *avoda zara* as a *na’atzutz*: “*v’chol hana’atzutzim...*” Mordechai is the *b’rosh* (cedar tree) which supplants the thorn tree in the *posuk* because he has the same name as the most important of the spices in the *ketores ha-samim*. The *Targum* of “*mor d’ror*” is “*marei dachei*,” which reads as “Mordechai.” The *sirpod*, a low thorn bush, is Vashti who becomes replaced by Esther, who is referred to as *hadas* (a myrtle tree), like her name, Hadassah.

As an introduction to *Megilas Esther*, this *derasha* is meant to teach us a fundamental principle that lies behind the entire *Megila*.

Why are Haman and the *avoda zara* compared to a thorn tree? The Vilna Gaon, in his *peirush* of *Sefer Yeshayahu* gives the answer in his explanation of the following *posuk* from *Sefer Koheles*. The *posuk* says, (ז, ו) “-“like the sound of thorns under a pot, so is the laughing voice of a fool.” This refers to a person who, instead of firewood, uses thorns for his fuel to cook up his pot. Doing so does not work because the thorns have only a superficial resemblance to wood but are devoid of real substance. They snap, crackle, and pop like wood but lack the real inner substance which would enable them to reach the temperature necessary to actually cook the food. The laughing voice of a fool is the same. He sounds like a regular person, but lacks intelligence and substance and is unable to contribute anything meaningful to a conversation. Both the fool and the thorn tree lack the substance necessary for meaningful input.

Similarly, the *oved avoda zara* looks like he is worshipping G-d when in fact he is merely serving himself. He worships his idol to bring a flow of sustenance to himself. Rambam writes in the beginning of *Hilchos Avoda Zara* that idol worship is a way to worship one’s self without having to be subservient to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. Haman epitomized this thorn tree when he mandated that everyone bow down to him. He was the embodiment of someone who lived for himself, for his own *kavod, ga’ava*, power and wealth, but without the inner substance of a human being which is his *emunah*. He was a human in appearance but not in substance. This is why Haman is compared to a thorn tree.

Mordechai was like a cedar tree. He stood tall, gave protection, and was as if made of “firewood”- the inner human essence. Rather than serving himself, he was the opposite of Haman because he had full *emunah* and was *mevateil* himself to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. He was a true human being, both externally and internally.

As well, Vashti was the feminine equivalent of Haman. She forced the Jewish girls to work on Shabbos without clothing. She did all of these things out of selfishness, never submitting herself to a Creator. In the Purim story, Esther takes her place as she also represents *hisbatlus* to Hakadosh Boruch Hu, as opposed to Vashti.

This *pesichta* to *Megilas Esther* is meant to teach the lesson of how the Jewish people should live and what the Jewish people should be living for, which is *hisbatlus* to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. When they fasted three days straight and did *teshuva*, they were *mechaper* for the *aveira* which brought them to such a dire situation. They had bowed down to a *tzelem* of Achashveirosh and were *neheneh* from his *seudah*, all out of selfishness.

Rather than being *moser nefesh* for Hashem like Chananya, Misho'el, and Azarya who went into fire instead of bowing down to the *tzelem*, they gave in. This is why the *kapara* for the failing of the Jewish People was *mesiras nefesh* for the will of Hashem.

The *nes* of *Megilas Esther* comes from the *mesiras nefesh* which supplanted the *na'atzutz* with the *b'rosh*. *Mesiras nefesh* turns an empty existence, bereft of *emunah*, into a human existence by living a life of purpose which is the essence of a person. This *mesiras nefesh* gave eternal life to the Jewish People, without which we would not be here today.

This is true in every single person's life as well. Our purpose is to strive to be unlike the selfish *na'atzutz*, but rather to live with the *penimiyus* which makes us humans, namely *emunah*, *d'veykus*, and *hisbatlus* to Hakadosh Boruch Hu.

I hope these words will serve as an introduction to Purim for all of us and may we all be *zoche* to the light of Purim and advance at least one step, if not more, in our *avodas Hashem* and subordination to *ratzon Hashem*; and to eliminating the selfish focus from our lives and instead directing ourselves towards others and Hakadosh Boruch Hu. In this way, may the entire Jewish People collectively be *mekayem* the *posuk* with its conclusion,

”תחת הנעצוץ יעלה ברוש ותחת הסרפד יעלה הדס והיה לה' לשם לאות עולם לא יכרת”