

INSIGHTS

בשנת שלוש למלכו (א,ג)

Why did Achashverosh wait until this time to celebrate.

R' Avraham Chadida gives two novel explanations of what Achashverosh was celebrating when he decided to make a party.

1- At this point he had achieved tranquility in the kingdom without rebellion, which previous kings had never enjoyed: tranquility had previously inspired rebellion.

2- At this point he had outlived his forefathers.

Ostensibly these are good reasons to celebrate- he had surpassed his forefathers. R' Avraham Chadida points out that Achashverosh celebrated only when he had reached these goals. Not until he had outdone his forefathers did Achashverosh feel cause to celebrate.

Torah View

We have a concept- איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו: who is wealthy? One who is satisfied with his portion. The question of course is: what should a person consider his portion.

It is interesting that in terms of longevity the Torah actually provides us a guide- we look at the age of our predecessors(not just our fathers but our ancestors over a longer term) and have an expectation to that period of time, just as the Avot looked at the years of their forefathers in order to measure their expected life span. Similarly, in order to evaluate his economic situation, one compares his financial status to that of his predecessors. If his economic situation deteriorates when compared to

his predecessor, he is considered to have become poor, and if his economic situation exceeds theirs, he is considered to have become wealthy. As the Rambam explains regarding the obligation of charity (Matnot Aniyim 7,3) "Even if it was the custom of this poor person to ride on a horse and a slave would run before him, and the poor person lost his fortune, one must buy him a horse to ride on and a slave to go before him". Thus one's financial situation is based on the comparison with the past – if one succeeds in maintaining the status quo, he should be happy with his portion.

While it is nice if one has more than his predecessors, but when is happy only if he has "more", then he is not happy with his lot. [This may also be reflected in Esav's comment of "יש לי רב", I have more. We have an obligation to be happy as Yaakov said "יש לי כל", i.e. I have all- I am content with that which is in my portion.]

עשה משתה.... כרצון איש ואיש (א,ג)

When Is It Acceptable To Throw A Party: Ethical Guidelines.

R' Avraham Chadida says Achashverosh had a valid reason for making a party; it was not done to be ostentatious, but rather to display a נפש רחבה , a generous heart. The Maharal, in his commentary on Megila, also stated that it was proper for Achashverosh to make this party.

Even Avraham Avenu made a major party, inviting all the important people of his generation in honor of Yitzchak. R' Yehuda Hanasi had an extravagantly set table all year round, even though he did not indulge in pleasure in this world. When does one have the right to make a party? What is the guideline to differentiate between being showy and displaying a generous heart.

R' Avraham Chadida explains that the reason for demonstrating wealth is not to exhibit ones importance as a wealthy person. One whose wealth and importance are known may choose to share it with others in order to demonstrate a generous heart. The expenditure demonstrates that he is not interested in using the money merely for his own personal edification, but wants others to enjoy and benefit with him.

Everyone knew Achashverosh was a powerful and wealthy king. He had nothing to prove regarding his wealth, but he did need to show that he cared about others. The party he threw demonstrated a nefesh rechava. Similarly, when Avraham Avenu threw a party, everyone knew of his wealth and prosperity. His purpose was to use the money to entertain others and to make them feel comfortable so that he could spread his message in the world. Similarly, R' Yehuda Hanasi had political prestige and massive wealth with no one to impress. He did not require the food for himself, but he wanted an impressive table to be available when talmidei chachamim visited in order to solidify the study of Torah.

שמונים ומאת יום (א,ד)

How Do I Know If I am Charitable for the sake of A Mitzva, Rather than the personal satisfaction that philanthropy provides

R' Avraham Chadida says the fact that Achashverosh made the party for such an extended amount of time demonstrates that it was done not just for self edification, but rather because he had a נפש רחבה, generous heart. What is the connection- how does the extended time determine the sincerity of the act?

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ZT"l once gave an explanation of how to evaluate the motivation of our actions.

He explained that when a person does an act of charity he really must question his motivation. Is the act being done to serve the will of Hashem, just to fulfill the commandment, or is the motivation the aesthetic pleasure of the act. Every act of charity has within it a pleasurable element: I like feeling magnanimous, I enjoy that others turn to me for help; I feel good that I have the power to save or help others. How do we know if our motivation is sincere? A good indicator is to see how we react when the act is protracted over an extended period of time. R' Soloveitchik explains by way of illustration. In Boston he would often receive people seeking charity. He would invite them in, receive them warmly, and ask to hear their problem to see how he could help. He would imagine that on one Sunday afternoon, fifty people arrived one after another seeking charity. Would he have the same feeling of graciousness for the fiftieth person as he did for the first? If the motivation for the act of charity is purely to serve Hashem and to fulfill the commandment, it should make no difference if it was the first or the fiftieth.

The test of the motivation of an act is how it is carried out after an extended period of time. When the act is repeated time after time, man becomes bored. When man is bored with an act it loses its aesthetic pleasure. If man continues to do the act with enthusiasm even after it is being done extensively, this demonstrates that the act is not just for one's own aesthetic pleasure.

With this we can understand why R' Avraham Chadida said that the fact that Achashverosh made the party for such an extended period of time (one hundred and eighty days), demonstrates that he had a generous heart.

Since the party continued for so long a time and the king still acted with the same enthusiasm, it showed that Achashverosh was truly interested in doing the act for others.

והשתייה כדת אין אונס (א,ח)

Why Did Achashverosh Allow His Guests To Get Drunk In Front Of Him?

How Do We Get Drunk Before Hashem?

R' Avraham Chadida brings in the name of his teacher R' Shem Tov, that the custom was that any one who got drunk in the king's presence would be killed. Why then was Achashverosh willing to permit thousands of guests to get drunk in his presence?

We see a similar dichotomy regarding Hashem. On the one hand, serving Hashem when one is drunk in the Beis Hamikdash is punishable by death. Yet on festivals and Purim, we partake of wine without hesitation. We should not think that when we are getting drunk we can stop serving Hashem. There is no time when we are not serving Hashem: "every act we do, every pleasure even of a totally permitted nature, that does not involve serving the Creator through them, these acts are against His will" (Nesivos Shalom vol.1, pg. 119).

It appears that Achashverosh was looking for a new approach to maintain power. The most common method was to rule by instilling fear. This achieves control over the body but certainly not the hearts of the people. Achashverosh felt that the best way to prevent rebellion was to befriend his subjects. This sense of friendship is what he hoped to accomplish with an extended party, spending many hours together in a relaxed atmosphere. Drinking wine and lessening inhibitions was part of that atmosphere.

The same is true להבדיל regarding the true King, Hashem. Hashem wants service both founded on fear and love of Him. Drinking wine before Hashem, in the right setting, such as a Seudas Shabbos and Yom Tov, or on Purim, when we are in the right frame of mind, and want to feel closer to Hashem, is a positive thing. Of course, the key is for man to remember that even drinking can be part of serving Hashem. As soon as a person drinks just to enjoy himself and loses a feeling of closeness to Hashem, he is no longer doing a mitzvah, but rather serving himself.

ותמאן המלכה ושתי לבוא (א, יב)

The "Humility" of Vashti- A New Concept: That Vashti Refused to Come Because of ענוה Humility. Two Types of Humility

R' Avraham Chadida makes a very strange comment regarding Vashti's refusal to come to the party. He says it was due to her "humility"-ענוותה. (The choice of word is especially puzzling, since he did not choose the word צניעותה, "modesty"). How did Vashti demonstrate "humility"?

Two Forms of Humility

A person can be considered humble if he displays a lack of self assurance, regarding some aspect of his physical or intellectual attributes. Most people do not want to be put in the spotlight because they are self conscious and terrified of public scrutiny. The vast majority cringe at the thought that they may not live up to expectations. Most women are self conscious about their appearance and feel that there are many things they would like to change, or remodel, in their bodies. (There has been an explosion of cosmetic surgery in recent years, not for people who are ugly, but for women who by all

appearances are already considered beautiful). It is likely that even the woman who was proclaimed to be "the most beautiful woman in the world" might be insecure about her physical beauty. This insecurity about Vashti's physical perfection, "Physical Humility" might be the ענוה R' Avraham Chadida was referring to. It does not demonstrate a great moral character, but rather a lack of appreciation of the natural beauty which Hashem bestowed. Vashti was not interested in the whole world looking her over to see if she were truly the most perfect. This was especially true when she was expected to parade around without clothing to cover her imperfections.

This humility is very distinct from the "Spiritual Humility" of our forefathers. That humility conveys that as much as man tries to serve his Creator and do what is right, he can never quite live up to his spiritual responsibility.

לא על המלך לבדו ... כי על כל השרים (א,טז)

An Affront To The King is An Affront to The Nation

R' Avraham Chadida asks why, when Achashverosh asked what to do to Vashti, the advisors did not suggest that he wait until his anger passed. R' Avraham Chadida explains that the advisors actually wanted Vashti punished, because they felt offended themselves, in that an affront to the king is an affront to all the officers. R Soloveitchik once explained that a king is not allowed to forgo his honor (Ketubot 17a, Sotah 41b), because the king's honor is not his alone, but really the honor of the nation, and therefore he cannot pass over its honor. So too here, the slight to the king was really a slight to the authority of the whole government.

וכל הנשים יתנו יקר לבעליהן (א,כ)

Lack of Respect – A Society-Wide Crisis.

Difference between Honoring and Treasuring

R' Avraham Chadida asks how the king and his advisors could suggest punishing Vashti in order to set an example for other women. If a person does not deserve punishment on account of his or her their actions, the concept of punishing just to set an example is wrong. R' Avraham Chadida answers that, although it is not normally right for a judgment to be carried out in order to set an example, in this case, it was proper, since failure to do so could lead to instability in the country.

From R' Avraham Chadida's answer we understand a much deeper problem also prevalent in our times. Lack of respect is a society wide problem. The same open nature of society that allows political figures to be publicly ridiculed teaches a basic disrespect for authority. This filters down to a lack of respect for religious leaders, the rabbi in shul, teachers in school and even spouses. Often, one looks at a husband and questions why this person is worthy of my respect- he is not the richest, not the wisest, not the most religious man I know. Maybe a wife feels she has greater intellectual or financial abilities than her husband. Why should she have to honor him? What Achashverosh wanted to reestablish was a respect for government and a respect for family structure. What is the basis of this respect? It is interesting that the Megilla chose the word יקר, precious, instead of the typical word כבוד, which means honor. The Malbim (in the Geresh Hacarmel) explains the word כבוד, honor, denotes someone deserving respect, such as a wise man or elder. The word יקר denotes respect for something due to its rarity, something hard to find, such as gold. The value of gold is not due to its inherent value but

rather due to its rarity. Achashverosh was thus explaining that every husband deserved respect because he is יקר, if he is seen by his wife as someone to be treasured. One treasures the relationship. It is common knowledge how difficult it is to find a mate to whom you can relate. You treasure the love and devotion- is that not something rare and priceless? [Every person has a חלק ה' ממעל, but what makes that portion so much more valuable, is that the portion your husband has is your portion too. When a wife treasures it, sees it as her treasure, then that portion becomes the most valuable of all.]

כל נערה בתולה טובת מראה (ב,ג)

Achashverosh's Beauty Pageant – Seeking Inner Beauty?

No Lineage, No Money, No Outer Beauty, Just "Inner Beauty"- Perfect Wife

Question 1. R' Avraham Chadida asks a question why Achashverosh's advisors suggest holding a beauty pageant to find a new wife for Achasverosh, without investigating the contestant's lineage. It is totally inappropriate for the king to marry a peasant. R' Avraham Chadida offers two possibilities: Since Vashti had been so beautiful, if the new wife had great lineage, but was not beautiful, the king might feel depressed. Additionally, the king may have felt that since he so hastily divorced his first wife (R' Avraham Chadida is of the opinion that Vashti was divorced not executed), any royal families would hesitate to offer daughters in marriage.

We will now offer a new possibility to resolve this question in context of two other questions.

Question 2. When Achashverosh sought a new wife we would imagine he would seek physical beauty. But the Megilla describes the woman Achashverosh was seeking as- טובת מראה. This is an unusual term, because in the Torah physical beauty is described as יפת תואר , beautiful in form (as we see regarding a captive in war). The term טובת מראה usually denotes inner beauty (see Rashi on Bereishis 29,17 "זיו קלסתר"). Why would Achashverosh possibly seek inner beauty instead of outer beauty?

Question 3. Why does the Megilla say that Achashverosh "remembered Vashti and all that she had done" and then decided to find a new wife. Why would remembering all Vashti had done encourage him to seek a new wife? One would think he would recoil from remarriage when reminded of the Vashti experience!

Solution

The king had seen that Vashti was very self absorbed due to her famous great lineage and outstanding physical beauty. He remembered all she had done did and how self centered she had been and therefore decided on a new approach. This time he would **not** seek a wife from a royal family- so that she would not be obsessed up with her great lineage. He would also **not** look for someone of great outer physical beauty who would be enmeshed in vanity. Instead Achashverosh sought a wife who possessed inner beauty, someone who would focus on him. The concept of נשאת חן בעיני כל ראה, (Esther 2,15) represents this concept. As the Talmud explains (Megilla 13a): "To each person she met Esther appeared to be a native of his own country". Esther gave each person the feeling that she totally