

# חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

# Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

by Dr. Joseph Geliebter

## Topics Covered

### Purim

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- ▶ *Who is this and what is he – The Fulfillment of "and the opposite occurred" A wondrous explanation of Moshe's request that his name be erased*
- ▶ *A comprehensive and deep explanation of the miracles of Purim*
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- ▶ *The reason all the holidays will be nullified except for Purim*
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- ▶ *"This reading [of the Megillah] is the Hallel"—for only when reading all the miracles together*

## Purim

#### I

### Who is this and what is he – The Fulfillment of "and the opposite occurred"

It is stated in the Midrash: "Rabbi Yudan and Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, wherever it says in Megillas Esther 'King Achashverosh' - the pasuk speaks of Achashverosh, and wherever it says 'King' without specification - the pasuk refers also to the King of the World – Hashem (Midrash Aba Gurion, Chapter 1).

According to the words of the Midrash, one must wonder about the sacred custom of Klal Yisrael that during Simchas Torah, they sing with great joy and supreme devotion the piyyut "Ha'aderes Ve'haemunah" with the special addition "Who is this and what is He" מי "הוא זה ואיזה הוא" which Achashverosh said, as it is written (Megillah 7:5), "Then King Achashverosh said, and said to Queen

Esther, "Who is he and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" where the response in the Megillah is "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman," but in the song of Simchas Torah, we respond, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him!" "זה א-לי ואגודה". One must wonder about this ancient custom of Klal Yisrael, why did they see fit to use words that came from the impure mouth of that foolish idolater king, which were directed at the cursed Haman, to become a question coming from the pure mouths of holy Klal

- ▶ *does one grasp the magnitude of the miracle*
- ▶ *The words of the Maharal of Prague about how a hidden miracle is exceedingly great*
- ▶ *Megillas Esther and the days of Purim—a rectification of the Sin of the Golden Calf and the level of the World to Come*

## II

- ▶ *Delightful insights into Megillas Esther*

Yisrael, directed towards Hashem, blessed be He, and blessed be His name?

### **The very writing of these verses in the Megillah is their sanctity enacted by the mouths of Israel**

It seems reasonable to say that since these words were written in Megillas Esther, which is among the holy writings of Tanach, these words are holy, and we have permission to use them. When these words come out from the mouths of the holy people of Yisrael with pure intentions, then on the contrary, this action does good, and it rectifies all that was diminished from these words when they came from the mouths of the nations of the world. Now in being said by Klal Yisrael, they have ascended and returned to their root, and what initially came from the mouths of the nations of the world was an aspect of "ירידה לצורך" "descent for the sake of ascent" for these words until they would be fully rectified.

However, here there is an additional

depth unique to our matter in Megillas Esther. Let us preface this by considering the repetition of language in the aforementioned pasuk, "ויאמר המלך" "ויאמר" Then, "אחשverוש לאסתר המלכה מי הוא זה ואי זה הוא".

Achashverosh said, and said to Queen Esther, 'Who is he and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?'" See in the Gemara (Megillah 16a) what they expounded on this. It seems to me to add that indeed the first "said" refers to Achashverosh, as it is written, "Then King Achashverosh said..." and as per the aforementioned Midrash. But in the second "said," the speaker is hidden as it is written, "...and said to Queen Esther...".

It seems to me that the "hidden said" is the hidden hand of divine providence which performs hidden miracles throughout all the events of Megillah, and it is what stood for us to bring forth these words from Achashverosh's mouth, who himself was a partner in the plot to

destroy us, G-d forbid, since he was the one who sold us to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated, and certainly, would have wanted to deny the whole matter, and instead, through the power of the hidden hand of providence, he brought forth these words to bring about the downfall of the wicked Haman.

This is truly the fulfillment of the central idea in Megillas Esther and the holiday of Purim of ונהפך הוא "and the opposite occurred" that Hashem, blessed be He, turned and reversed the words that came from an impure mouth, which was itself guilty, to be against its accomplice in crime, to be for our salvation, and also in beautiful eloquence! And by this power, it was already established that in the future, these words would be turned into songs and praises of Klal Yisrael with their closeness to the Righteous One of the world, blessed be His name.

And when we delve deeper into the matter and investigate it thoroughly, we will see the full magnitude and strength of the concept of "V'nahafoch hu" ("and it was turned around" / "the opposite happened") in this context.

For indeed, the words "This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him" (Zeh Keli ve-anvehu) were uttered in the Song of the Sea right after the "illumination of the face" – the great revelation expressed in "And Israel saw the great hand that Hashem had wrought upon Egypt" (Shemos 14:31). Regarding this, our Sages of blessed memory taught: "A maidservant saw at the sea what Yechezkel son of Buzi did not see" (a famous midrashic statement emphasizing the extraordinary level of divine revelation at the splitting of the sea, surpassing even prophetic visions).

On the other hand, the words "Who is this, and which is he?" (Mi hu zeh ve-eizeh hu – from Esther 7:5, where Achasverosh asks about the one plotting against the Jews) were spoken in a state of "hester panim" (concealment/hiding of the Divine Face). This aligns with what our Sages expounded: "From where in the Torah do we learn of Esther? 'And I will surely hide My face on that day'" (Devarim 31:18 – Chullin 139b), where the name "Esther" is hinted at through the idea of concealment.

And the entire Megillah (Book of Esther) is one long account of a chain of hidden miracles (nes nistarim). These words ["Who is this, and which is he?"] rise up and become united / fused with the words that represent the pinnacle of revelation and the illumination of the Divine Face!

In essence, the teaching highlights a profound inversion ("V'nahafoch hu"): the explicit, overwhelming revelation at the sea ("This is my God") contrasts with – yet ultimately connects to and transforms – the hidden providence in the Purim story, where G-d is concealed yet unmistakably present, turning everything around in the end.

See in our book "Chamudei Shai" on the Book of Bereishis, in the essay for Parashas Toldos, where we expanded on this matter at length and with deep understanding.

### **Who is this and what is he – The Fulfillment of "and the opposite occurred"**

When reflecting on the holiday of Purim and the reading of the Megillah, there are many matters that are difficult to understand – that beg explanation.

**Questions about the magnitude of the greatness of Purim and the Megillah Reading:**

A) Why are we obligated to listen to every word of the Megillah—to the extent that one who misses even a single word, has not fulfilled his obligation?! One would think that as long as the listener did not divert his attention from the main events recounted in the Megillah and he grasped the essential points, it would be sufficient. Yet, the Sages were not satisfied with this and **required us to hear every single word—to the extent that one who does not, has not fulfilled his obligation!** What is the message conveyed here?

B) The Gemara in *Megillah* (14a) already raised the question of why we do not recite Hallel on Purim, for, as the Gemara there says, if we say Hallel for being delivered from slavery to freedom, "certainly we should say it when delivered from death to life!" R' Nachman's answer is, "**The reading [of the Megillah] is the Hallel.**" Similarly, Rambam rules: "**Hallel was not instituted on Purim because the Megillah reading takes the place of Hallel**" (*Laws of Megillah and Chanukah* 3:6). This is

difficult to understand—how can the story of the Megillah, which is comprised of various narratives such as the killing of Vashti, the conspiracy of Bigsan and Seresh, the king's disturbed sleep, Haman's decree, and the salvation of the Jewish people, substitute for Hallel, which is entirely song and praise?!

C) Also difficult to understand is our Sages' teaching that all the holidays are destined to be abolished except Purim, as it says: "**And these days of Purim will never pass from among the Jews, nor shall their memory cease from their descendants.**" The Rambam cites this teaching as halacha at the end of *Laws of Megillah*. How is it possible that Purim—a rabbinically ordained holiday commemorating a hidden miracle—is greater than Torah-mandated holidays commemorating revealed miracles like the Exodus of Egypt, the Giving of the Torah, and the Clouds of Glory? This is astonishing!

D) Additionally, the Sages tell us that in the future, **the holy writings of the Neviim (Prophets) and Kesuvim (Writings) will all be abolished, except for Megillas Esther**, "for it is like the Five Books of the

Torah and the Oral Torah, which will never be abolished" (Rambam, end of *Laws of Megillah*). What is the unique power of Megillas Esther—which does not even explicitly mention Hashem's name—that surpasses all the explicit prophecies of the other prophets, such that specifically this scroll will endure forever, just like the Torah of Moshe?

**Revealing the hidden hand of Divine Providence**

**Purim is the story of a hidden miracle.** In contrast to the revealed, supernatural miracles of the Egyptian exodus, the story of Purim unfolds entirely within the natural order, composed of numerous seemingly unrelated events—such as the killing of Vashti, the plot of Bigsan and Seresh, Haman's decree, and the king's disturbed sleep. **But that is precisely its advantage: the miracle is recognized specifically through the inter-weaving of all these facts together; it allows us to see the guiding hand of His providence.** And this is the reason we must **listen carefully to every word of the Megillah, with mind and heart attentive to the entire sequence of events, for only through this can**

one discern the guiding hand of Divine Providence.

The "Hallel" that emerges from **Megillas Esther**, which is truly the **revelation of the hidden**, as it is stated in the holy books, is **the act of publicizing the hidden miracles** of Divine Providence that guides all the major events in the world and everything that happens to the Jewish people. And it seems to me that when **the entire congregation** recites, in one breath, **the ten sons of Haman** who were hanged, **which are written in the Megillah in the form that songs are written in holy scriptures**, it is truly in the nature of a song! And indeed, this praise is greater than any Hallel of this world, because it is in the nature of the revelation of the World to Come, as will be explained below.

### **Revealed miracles serve as a support for faith**

During the Exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah, all the countless revealed miracles did not prevent the people from deteriorating into the sin of the Golden Calf and the other shortcomings that occurred in the generation of the desert. It seems to me that all the revealed miracles were necessary because of the lowly state we were in, as we were in

the forty-ninth gate of impurity; the revealed miracles came to compel us to believe in Hashem and His Torah as an undeniable fact. And in the same vein, we needed "He held the mountain over them like a barrel," literally, to force us to accept the Torah. All of this was in the nature of serving Hashem out of fear – and the moment we diverted our attention from all this, we fell backward.

### **The power of a hidden miracle**

Purim teaches us, in the words of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, may his merit protect us, that "even in the concealment within the concealment, Hashem is surely to be found." And as our Sages, of blessed memory, said, "Where is Esther hinted at in the Torah? In the words 'V'anochi haster astir panai' ('And I will surely hide My face')." When we see Hashem, even within the concealment, it's no longer possible to divert our attention from Him, blessed be He. And perhaps this is the intent of the Maharal of Prague, when he says that a hidden miracle is greater than a revealed one. For when Hashem is revealed within the concealment, evil cannot find a place for itself. And this is the level of the World to Come—that it

becomes revealed that "there is nothing besides Him."

### **The Scroll of Esther and the holiness of the days of Purim - rectification of the sin of the Golden Calf, and the level of the World to Come**

The message that comes forth from the reading of the Megillah and the holiness of the days of Purim is a revelation of the future final rectification of the sin of the Golden Calf. In the sin of the Golden Calf, despite the support of revealed miracles, we fell. Through the message of the Megillah and the revelation of Purim—in which we see Hashem even in the concealment—we too return and accept the Torah upon ourselves without any coercion or compulsion but out of complete love, as it says, "*Kiyemu v'kiblu haYehudim*" ("the Jews established and accepted").

Through this, we make a counterbalancing repentance for all that was lacking in us in the generation of the desert, and we reach the peak of faith, in which there is no longer any place at all for evil, and it is revealed that "there is none besides Him," and this is the rectification of the Era of Moshiach. And with this, it is well

understood why Megillas Esther and the days of Purim are eternal, for they are the revelation of the light of the end of days that will come speedily in our days, amen.



## II

### **Delightful Insights on Megillas Esther**

#### **The virtue of saying something in the name of the one who said it**

"And she told the king in Mordechai's name" – Our Sages said in *Pirkei Avos* (6:6): "One who quotes something in the name of the person who said it... This teaches us that anyone who says something in the name of the person who said it brings redemption to the world, as it says, 'And Esther told the king in Mordechai's name.'"

Esther told Achashveirosh about the evil plot of Bigson and Seresh that she heard from Mordechai, "and it was written in the book of the chronicles." Many years later, the king's sleep was disturbed. **All of it was a hidden miracle. It looked like it was just natural, but all of it tied together into one big miracle, and Hashem orchestrated the events one by one:**

They read before the king from the book of the chronicles. Haman entered to see the king, and the king asked him, "*What should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?*"

Haman thought the king meant him. He advised that such a man should ride on the king's horse, and someone from among the king's officers should go before him and announce: "Thus shall be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor." Achashveirosh then said: "Do so for Mordechai the Jew." It was "*v'nahafoch hu*" – a total reversal!

**That was the point at which the salvation began.** Haman had come to tell Achashveirosh that he built a gallows to hang Mordechai—and suddenly everything was completely reversed!

That was the beginning of the end for Haman, **and it was all because Esther reported the plot to assassinate the king and said it in Mordechai's name.**

And in *Maseches Megillah* (15a), we find: "**R' Elazar said in the name of R' Chanina:** 'One who says something in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world... etc.'"

**The Tanna, Rabbi Elazar, is teaching us here the importance of saying something in the name of the one who said it – even while he is himself saying a teaching in the name of the one who said it!** And so it is throughout the entire Talmud – we find countless instances where they toiled to quote something specifically in the name of the Tanna or Amora who said it, to the extent that when there was some uncertainty as to who said it, some would attribute it to one sage and others to another.

**It seems to me, as a possibility,** that just as there is "**one who says something in the name of the one who said it**" in the positive sense, there is also "**in the name of the one who said it**" in a negative sense. This goes back to the very beginning of humanity, when Adam Harishon said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me," throwing the blame onto her, and she, in turn, throwing it onto the snake.

#### **Esther rectified the sin of Adam and Chava**

The redemption came through Queen Esther, who reported the plot to the king in Mordechai's name. As is known, every time the

Megillah mentions **"the king,"** it alludes also to Hashem. In my humble opinion, it seems that she made a rectification for the first sin, when they sinned and blamed others. She uses the words, "to King Achashverosh," **but aside from the earthly King Achashverosh, it also refers to the King of the universe, Hashem.** She says to the King of the Universe—"in Mordechai's name"—in order to hasten redemption through rectifying the sin of Adam Harishon.

**The deeper meaning of "they too participated in the miracle"**

Our Sages said (*Megillah* 4a), "R' Yehoshua ben Levi said: 'Women are obligated in the reading of the Megillah because they too participated in that miracle.' And the *Tosafos* (there, s.v. "*She'af hein hayu b'oso haneis*") cites the words of the **Rashbam**, who explains that **the main miracle came about through the women**—on Purim through Esther, on Chanukah through Yehudis, and on Pesach through the righteous women of that generation. Therefore, they are obligated in the reading of the Megillah, in the lighting of the Chanukah candles, and in the drinking of the Four Cups on Pesach, even though these are

*"mitzvos asei she'hazman grama"* ("positive commandments that are time-bound").

**And this can be expanded further:** the Megillah is called "**Megillas Esther,**" and there is also "**Taanis Esther.**" Esther is the one who said, "Go, gather together all the Jews" and established a three-day fast to pray for their lives to be spared. She is thus the one who established the order of the fast, like a leader who directs all the affairs.

Similarly, at the end of the Megillah it says, "**And Esther the queen, daughter of Avichayil, and Mordechai the Jew wrote down all [the acts of] power to confirm this second letter of Purim,**" It first mentions **Esther,** and then Mordechai. And again it says, "And the statement of **Esther** confirmed these matters of Purim," which, as Rashi explains, means that she consulted with the sages of that generation, advising them to establish the laws of Purim.

**The decree included everyone, and therefore everyone must give thanks**

**However, Tosafos explain** that "they too participated in the

miracle" means that they too were included in Haman's decree to destroy, kill, and annihilate. Therefore, they are obligated in the reading of the Megillah, because the decree was against the entire Jewish people—men, women, and children—and thus, even though this is a *"mitzvos asei she'hazman grama,"* when there is a decree upon everyone, G-d forbid, and we are saved through a miracle, whether revealed or hidden, as in the time of Purim, we all celebrate together. No one is left out. **Everyone together!**

**The reason for the congregation reading the ten sons of Haman in one breath**

**Regarding the reading of the ten sons of Haman, we must understand:** Why do we read their names in one breath before the "*baal korei*" ("Torah reader")? Why can't we fulfill our obligation by hearing it from the *baal korei*, relying on the principle of "*shomei'a k'oneh*" ("hearing is like answering")? Another thing we need to understand: When we look carefully at the letters in the names of

the ten sons of Haman, we find three **small letters** – a *tav* (ת), a *shin* (ש), and a *zayin* (ז). What do these hint at?

To answer the first question, I saw in the sefer *Har Tzvi* by the gaon R' Tzvi Pesach Frank, o.b.m., He explains that "**shomei'a k'oneh**" is that if a person listens and has the intention of fulfilling his obligation, it is considered **as if he said it himself**. But since here there is the additional requirement of an *action* – to say it in *one breath* – this cannot be fulfilled through someone else. Therefore, each person must say it himself.

### **Future miracles are alluded to in the Megillah**

As for the second question – why are the letters *tav*, *shin*, and *zayin* written small? This was explained by Rav Michael Ber Weismandel, o.b.m. (who escaped the Holocaust to try and save the Jewish people. He jumped from a train on the way to Auschwitz. He sent out proof of the crematoria, but it fell on deaf ears and blind eyes). He connected the miracle of the Megillah to the famous Nuremberg Trials, in which the worst of the Nazi war criminals, may their names be erased, were brought to justice. Eleven of

them were sentenced to death by hanging in the year 5706 (1946), and right before Rosh Hashanah of 5707 (1946), one of them smuggled a cyanide pill into his cell and committed suicide, leaving ten.

The date of their execution was Hoshana Rabbah 5707 (1946). And when they were being taken to the gallows, one of them – **Julius Streicher, may his name be erased** – shouted in front of everyone, like he was possessed by a dybbuk: "*Purimfest* (Purim Feast) 1946!" All the newspapers of the time, throughout the world, quoted his words. The Hebrew year at that time was 5707 (*Tav Shin Zayin*). R' Michael Ber Weismandel explained that although the sentencing occurred in 5706, the execution was pushed off to Hoshana Rabbah – **the Day of Judgment** – 5707. And there is a clear allusion to this in the narrative of the hanging of the ten sons of Haman – as the Gemara (*Megillah* 7a) says, "[Megillas] Esther was stated with '*Ruach Hakodesh*' ('Divine inspiration')." Indeed, Esther saw with her holy spirit the hanging of the ten Nazis thousands of years in advance.

With this, we can also understand the

connection between saying the ten sons of Haman in one breath and the year 5707. The reading of the Megillah – in most of the world and most years – comes after the fasting, and the names of the ten sons of Haman are read near the end of the Megillah, when the fast is taking its toll on us, and our concentration is lacking. **Therefore, the Sages instituted a regulation that compels us to focus with greater concentration – namely, the saying of the names in one breath.** This leads us to reflect on the small letters *tav*, *shin*, and *zayin*, which already thousands of years earlier, hinted at the hidden miracles that would take place for the Jewish people until the end of time. (See what I wrote above on this matter from another perspective.)

### **Purim as a time of teshuvah like Yom Kippur**

The holy *Sfas Emes* writes that "**Purim is a time of teshuvah, for we are taught that Yom Hakippurim and Purim are the same concept.**" For, whereas all the other miracles done on behalf of the Jewish people came in the merit of their good deeds – i.e., they were prepared and worthy of

miracles—the miracle of Purim, in which a Heavenly decree was nullified, came about only in the merit of the teshuvah they did.

We thus find that in the future, all the holidays will be nullified, but Purim will not be nullified. This is similar to the idea that in the place where *"baalei teshuvah"* ("returnees") stand, even completely righteous people cannot stand. And now, [on Purim], through joy, one can reach teshuvah, which on Yom Kippur can only be reached through fasting and affliction. Through the joy of Purim, we arrive at the same level of teshuvah that we attain on Yom Kippur through fasting and affliction. Purim is a time of teshuvah—but we reach that level through joy.

### **The path to teshuvah on Purim through recognizing Hashem's kindness**

One may add that the way to reach the level of *"teshuvah mei'ahavah"* ("repentance from love") on Purim is through recognizing Hashem. Every day, in the "Modim" blessing, we say: **"We thank You... for Your miracles that are with us every day, and for Your wonders and Your goodness at all times – evening, morning, and**

**afternoon. [You are] the Good One, for Your compassion never ends, and the Compassionate One, for Your kindnesses never cease, for we have always placed our hope in You."**

When we focus on this with complete intention, then just as with *"Modeh ani lefanecha, Melech chai v'kayam"* ("I give thanks before You, living and eternal King"), which we say upon waking up in the morning, we are recognizing Hashem and thanking Him, and through this, we reach a level of joy that comes from gratitude to Hashem for all the miracles and wonders—the hidden miracles He performs for us every day; the very fact that the Jewish nation lives, that the Jewish people continue.

If we say this with full intent, the level of joy and "teshuvah out of love" we reach is so high that it is like the joy and "teshuvah out of love" of Purim. **And this is why, on Purim, the blessing of "Al Hanissim" is included as part of the "Modim" blessing.**

### **The Megillah begins with a vav and ends with a vav**

"And it was in the days of Achashverosh" – Megillas Esther opens with the letter vav (*"vayehi"*) and

ends with the letter vav – *"vedover shalom lechol zaro"* ("and speaking peace to all his descendants"). I heard an explanation that the double vav adds up to twelve, and Mordechai was from the tribe of Binyomin, the twelfth tribe.

**And we can further add,** as we explained in Parashas Shemos regarding the vav at the beginning of *"Ve'eileh Shemos,"* that it adds to what came before – meaning that just as Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov (Yisroel) in Sefer Bereishis were tzaddikim, so too the children of Yisroel mentioned by name in Sefer Shemos were also tzaddikim. Similarly, in Parashas Mishpatim, the vav in *"Ve'eileh hamishpotim"* is a connection to the Giving of the Torah and adds to it. Similarly, by way of *"derash"* ("exposition"), we can say that the vav at the start of the Megillah and the vav at its end come to teach us something—that just like the entire story of the Megillah was a **hidden miracle**, with Hashem saving us only at the very last moment, **so it is with the story of the Jewish people in all generations, both before the days of Purim** (hinted at by the vav of *"vayehi"*) and after the days of Purim (hinted at by the vav of *"zaro"*). We may not see this every day, but it is certainly the case in every era and period. This is what the vav is hinting at—that the holiday of Purim

will never end; we will celebrate it forever.

Indeed, we say in the "Yotzer" for Parashas Zachor: "...If all the festivals will be nullified, the days of Purim will not be nullified" until the end of all generations. Always, the Jewish people are redeemed through a hidden miracle, even if we don't always perceive the hand of Hashem and the Shechinah that are always with us in exile. For although it is not revealed to us, but concealed, the fact remains that we are saved every single day, as it says: **"In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us, and Hashem saves us from their hand."**

This is the significance of the vav at the beginning and at the end of the Megillah

– to teach that **Megillas Esther is but one chapter in the continuous story of the Jewish people.** The *"vav hachibur"* ("connecting vav") at the beginning links us to our past, and the additional vav hachibur at the end links us to the present. We do not always see the rest of the story, and it is not recorded on parchment. Nevertheless, we believe that at every moment, in every period, Hashem saves us on a daily basis.

**In conclusion,** we may suggest a reason for the custom of saying a "Purim Torah" – that it reflects the Sages' teaching that *"Kiyemu v'kiblu"* ("they undertook and accepted") – meaning, they truly accepted [the Torah] in the days of Achashverosh." It was thus through Purim that

the Jewish people truly merited the Torah. This is especially true according to the words of the *Sfas Emes* (Purim 5636 [1876]), who says that the special quality of Purim is accessed through joy – for **there is greater power to innovate new Torah insights through joy.** Moreover, one could say that the meaning of *"ad d'lo yada"* ("until one does not know") is that the obligation to bring forth new Torah insights on the subject of Purim is to the extent of **"lo yada" – that one can no longer distinguish between one logical reasoning and another.**

*A freilichen Purim!*



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