



14&15 ADAR 5757



THE LAST LAUGH

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

When Sir Donald Wolfitt, the last of the great English actor/managers, was lying on his death bed, one of his young actors said to him:

“Sir Donald, after a life so filled with success and fame, dying must be hard...”

To which Sir Donald replied:

“Dying is easy...Comedy is hard.”

They say a coward dies many times; the same must also be true for comedians.

Any actor who has stood in front of an audience and watched a line that he practiced for weeks, clang helplessly to the floor to roars of silence will appreciate Sir Donald’s sentiments.

Comedy is hard because we don’t really understand what makes people laugh. We know what’s funny because we laugh at it. But trying to distill the essence of comedy into a set of principles or laws is not so easy.

One of the basic elements of comedy is incongruity. Seeing a king wearing a red clown’s nose is funny. Seeing a clown wearing a red nose isn’t.

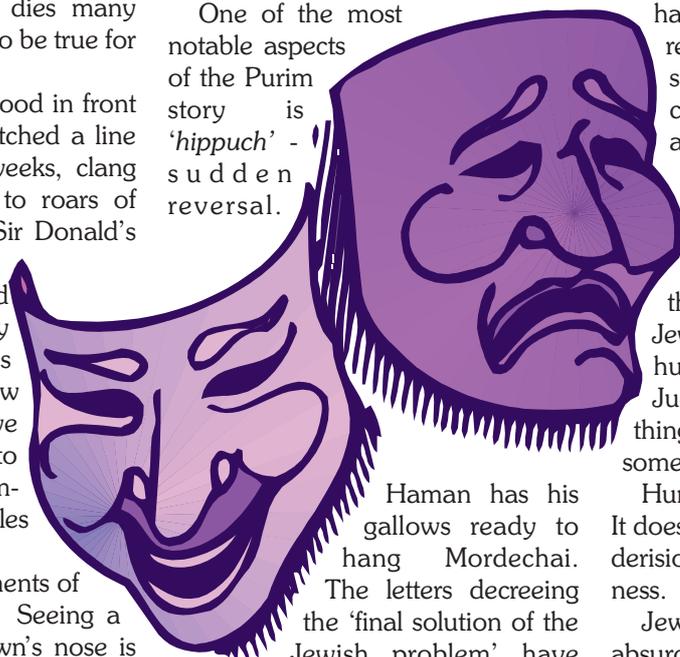
Underlying this aspect of incongruity is a deeper idea - absurdity. We expect the world to have a certain natural order of events. When these events are suddenly turned upside down, the result is comic.

Which brings us to another element of comedy: Sudden reversal.

Comedy depends on that mysterious quality, timing. The information which will make the audience laugh has to be revealed in a certain time-frame. Too quickly, and the laugh is stifled before it’s born. Too slowly, and the joke is ‘telegraphed’ - people see it coming and it dies it’s own death.

PERFECT TIMING

One of the most notable aspects of the Purim story is ‘hippuch’ - sudden reversal.



Haman has his gallows ready to hang Mordechai.

The letters decreeing the ‘final solution of the Jewish problem’ have been sent out in all 127 languages to the far corners of the Persian Empire. In a split second, everything was turned upside down.

The only difference between tragedy and comedy is the ending. The Purim story is a comedy in the classic sense. All seems set for dis-

aster and in an instant everything is turned on its head. This combination of total reversal and perfect timing gives Purim its special flavor of joy.

COMEDY VERSUS RIDICULE

Most of what passes today for comedy is in fact ridicule. Where is the real comedy that fills our mouths with laughter?

It seems that in a world which accounts cynicism as wisdom, we have lost the genuine article of real comedy. Like some ‘invasion of the body-snatchers,’ comedy has been abducted and in its place sits ridicule grinning like an imbecile.

Jews have always been known for their humor. It’s as if the world recognizes that there is something particularly Jewish about humor and that humor is part of the essence of Judaism. But how can something as serious as religion tolerate something as light as humor?

Humor doesn’t have to be light. It doesn’t have to lead to scoffing, to derision. Comedy is a serious business.

Jewish humor is about the absurd. It’s about the human condition itself. It’s about living in a world which seems to make no sense:

• *Belorussia. Mid-winter. Temperature: 45 degrees below zero. Moishe and Shloime are lying shivering in their tattered coats on two iron beds. Moshe said to Shloime: “Shloime, close*

continued on page two

MEGILLAH



WE GIVE YOU THE ANSWERS. YOU GIVE US THE QUESTIONS!

Ask questions from Megillat Esther which aptly fit the following answers. For example, if we tell you the answer is '127,' you tell us that the question is "How many countries did Achashverosh rule over?" Got it? Good.

ANSWERS

1. Boots
2. Sock
3. Vashti Dishes
4. Quiche
5. Dodo

6. "Hey Guy!"
7. Astair
8. Poor
9. Silver Key Cars
10. Eights

11. Ah! Ga! Gi!
12. Ari Sigh
13. Ari Die
14. Biza
15. "Hiya Hoody!"

QUESTIONS

1. 8:15 - What is one of the materials displayed at Achashverosh's feast which Mordechai wore after Haman's death?

2. 4:1 - What material did Mordechai wear when fasting and praying in order to anul Haman's decree?
3. What did the Persian queen serve at her party? What didn't she do after the party?
4. 2:5 - What egg-based luncheon pie sounds like Mordechai's great-grandfather?
5. 2:7 - What word defines Esther's father's relationship to Mordechai?
6. 2:8 - Who guarded Achashverosh's harem of prospective brides?
7. 2:7 - What is the last name of Fred, the famous dancer, which is mentioned in the Megilla?
8. 3:7 - What's a lot in Persia?
9. 3:9 - What did Haman offer to give

- ten thousand of to Achashverosh?
10. 5:14 - What numbers sound like something Haman swings from?
11. 8:3 - What baby noises sound like Haman's lineage?
12. 9:9 - What does a sad lion do when he hears about Haman's 8th son?
13. 9:9 - What does a sick lion do when he hears about Haman's 9th son?
14. 9:10 - What word for 'booty' sounds like the location of the leaning tower pronounced by someone with a bad cold?
15. 9:31 - What description of Mordechai's lineage sounds like a person saying hello to his friend Hoody?

5757 **PURIM**
SPECIAL EDITION

OHRNET
THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by
OHR SOMAYACH
TANENBAUM COLLEGE
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: 02-581-0315

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Produced and Designed by
the Office of Communication
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PRINTED IN ISRAEL AT OLD CITY PRESS 02-651-1529

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The Last Laugh... continued from page one

the window, it's cold outside."
"Moishele, and if I close the window, it will be warm outside?"

• Groucho Marx in a letter resigning from a golf club that didn't let in Jews. "Dear Sir, I do not wish to be part of a club that will have me as a member."
Behind every Jewish joke there's a Jewish tear. A wry bitter/sweet feeling of two thousand years of exile. Tears of sadness. Tears of joy.

In the Psalm, *Shir Hama'alos*, that we sing after a festive meal, there is a line that yearns for the coming of *Mashiach*: "Then will our mouths be filled with laughter..." When the *Mashiach* comes, he will come in an instant, and things will be totally turned upside down.

"Behind every Jewish joke there's a Jewish tear."

Just like Purim, he will come in crisis, in catastrophic reversal - *hippuch*. His coming will not be through gradual improvement. He will come in the darkest hour... which is always just before the dawn.

The bitter/sweet humor of the Jewish People will then be transformed to a sweet/sweet humor. There will no longer be an elegiac quality to it. Ridicule will be deposed from its throne of idiocy. Our mouths will be **filled** with laughter. It will be a laughter of discovery, a laughter of total realization.

Then we will see how all the pieces in this Comedy of the Absurd called Life fit into place.

Then we will laugh the last laugh.

NUDGE THE RABBI

This issue of NUDGE THE RABBI is sponsored by all those people who think the jokes in ASK THE RABBI are funny!

A TREIF QUESTION

Oy Chin Horrorshow wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My second cousin is married to a feminist Buddhist monk who converted to Judaism in a Humanist shul and following her conversion she joined a radical feminist Orthodox prayer group in the basement of a Dutch Anabaptist Church that also hosts a witches' coven regularly, and therefore the room is covered with pagan and satanic designs, which she incorporated into a challah cover design that she gave me as a gift to thank me for having them for Shabbos next week when she and my second cousin are coming next Shabbos together with their pedigree Rottweiler who can only eat rare warm Hippo steak and I was wondering how to keep it warm without making my stove treif?

Dear Oy Chin:

Use very heavy duty tin foil. Very heavy duty.

Sources:

- 'Diesel engines and Their Impact on 19th Century Yugoslavian Dance'; p. 987, footnote 51; Harcourt, Brace, & Youonavitch

STUMP THE RABBI

Arthur Quibblestein wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the capital of North Dakota? Which way does water go down drains in Australia? Do penguins have knees? Do chickens have lips? If you are driving at the speed of light and turn on your headlights will it help? What do you add to dehydrated water? How did Hume's logical positivism influence Marx's dialectic materialism, how are both their philosophies affected by Shroedinger's conceptualization of the observer's influence on experimental outcomes?

Dear Arthur Quibblestein,

Fargo, left, yes, no, it wouldn't hurt, desalinated salt, absolutely.

Anglebarth Morphous

<amorphous@compusquirt.com>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have a 500-dollar wager riding on the answer to the following question, so please answer honestly. Are the questions published in 'NUDGE the RABBI' for real,

written by sincere seekers of halachic clarity? Or are they fake, cultivated like a virus in the fertile petri dish of your imagination? Your speedy reply would be appreciated, because I need to know if I won the bet or not so I can report the earnings to the Internal Revenue Service before tax day, April 15th.

Earnestly,
Anglebarth Morphous

Dear A. Morphous,

The questions published in NUDGE the RABBI are all legitimate, true and authentic. Every single question is one hundred per cent genuine. There's not a fake one in the bunch. We don't make up any of them. Really. Honest.

Sources:

- Ripley's Believe It or Not

BITTLE RIDDLE

This week we ask:

What's holier than the Torah, dead people eat it, and if live people eat it they'll die?

- Posed by Shmuel Bendel

Answer:

Nothing.

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Excerpts from Rav Mendel Weinbach's

127

INSIGHTS into Megillas Esther

Chapter 11 PARTNERS IN HATRED Introduction

Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel (*Bamidbar* 24:20), and played a central role in all the attacks launched against Israel. The Amalekites may thus be the great enemy of Jewry but they certainly have no monopoly on anti-Semitism. What is the origin of anti-Semitism? Our Sages give a surprising answer.

“Why is it called Mount Sinai?” Rav Kahana was asked by one of the Sages. “On this mountain,” came the reply “*sinah* [hatred] descended upon the nations of the world” (*Shabbos* 89a).

This was Heaven’s way of communicating to the people who had accepted the challenge of being “a nation of *kohanim*” (*Shemos* 19:6) that there was no retreat from the role. They would always remain

a unique nation, set apart from others and inspiring them with their example. This uniqueness and example could be achieved in one of two ways — *Sinai* or *sinah*.

The pleasant, ideal way was that of *Sinai* — following the Torah guidelines for personal and national perfection, which would inspire the entire universe to follow suit. But if Jews balked at this responsibility and attempted to assimilate into universalistic mediocrity, there would always be some non-Jewish enemy around to remind them of their identity. That enemy’s *sinah* would help the Jews fulfill their role as an example by showing what happens to a nation that abandons its God. Inevitably it would also inspire *teshuvah*, repentance, which would return Jews to *Sinai* and bring an end to *sinah*.

Amalek was the first to attack Israel and therefore he is destined to be destroyed by it (*Bamidbar* 24:20). Haman, the instigator of the genocidal plot against the Jewish people, was indeed destroyed, while his partner in hatred — Achashveirosh — was permitted to continue his reign and grant power and pride to a nation returning to *Sinai*.

THE POWER OF THE RING

The king removed the ring from his hand and gave it to Haman... (3:10)

All the exhortations of forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses from the beginning of Jewish history were not as powerful in moving the Jews to *teshuvah* as the transfer of the king's ring to Haman. When news of this gesture reached them, they were inspired to fast and repent, which achieved the miracle of salvation.

But why did the transfer of the ring alarm the Jews so much more than Haman's decree itself?

Because it revealed Achashveirosh's hatred for his Jewish subjects, a hatred that may have surpassed even Haman's. Until now the Jews had reassured themselves that the king, who had never openly shown any antagonism towards them, would not be a party to Haman's genocide. The transfer of the signet, with which royal documents were sealed with irreversible finality, shattered this illusion.

The king was so anxious to sell out the Jews that not only did he demand no money of Haman, but he even gave him his ring. This brought home to them that they had a vicious enemy on the all-powerful throne. And even if the notoriously fickle Achashveirosh could be persuaded to sign and seal another decree rescinding the first, he had

entrusted the signet to Haman, so no such document would be forthcoming. With their last natural hope gone, they turned to Heaven for help.

THE HILL AND THE HOLE

The king said to Haman: "The silver is given to you as well as the



people, to do with them as you see fit." (3:11)

Achashveirosh's hatred for the Jews, already signaled in the transfer of his ring to Haman,

"...if Jews balked at this responsibility and attempted to assimilate into universalistic mediocrity, there would always be some non-Jewish enemy around to remind them of their identity."

came to full expression when he informed Haman that could keep all the money he offered and do as he wished with the people they

both despised. This scene has been compared to a dialogue between a man who had a hill in his field, which obstructed his cultivation of it, and another who had the same problem with a hole in his field. Each of them longed for what was in the other's field as a solution to his own problem. One day the man with the hole offered to buy the hill from his neighbor and use it to fill his hole. The man with the hill graciously declined the offer of money and begged him to take away the hill for the sake of both of them.

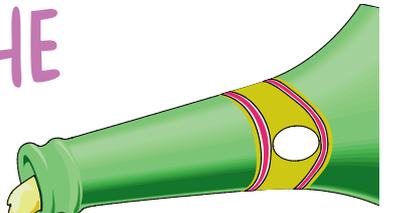
Achashveirosh and Haman both hated the Jews, but for opposite reasons. To the haughty king, this wise and noble people represented a hill that threatened his own stature. To Haman they were lowly, contemptible creatures to look down upon as one would a hole in the ground.

In another sense, these two symbols represent the two classical approaches to overcoming anti-Semitism throughout the ages. Jews who have believed that they are hated because they are different have discovered that assimilation only earns them the disrespect of those they try to imitate. These people now look down on them even more than before — the hole. Others have tried to win the affection of non-Jews by reminding them how much they owe the Jews, who have enriched their commerce, science and arts. This only produces an irritating hill of debts our enemies are glad to eliminate.

The inevitable conclusion is that *teshuvah* is the only solution to this problem.

*Look for more insights in Rav Weinbach's book **127 Insights into Megillas Esther**. Rav Weinbach is also author of **Turnabout**, the Purim Megillah written in novel format. Both books available from Targum Press. Distributed by Feldheim Publishers.*

UNDER THE AFFLUENCE OF INCOHOL



One of the most unusual *mitzvoth* during the year is to drink on Purim until we cannot tell the difference between “Haman the accursed and Mordechai the blessed.”

I’m not averse to a small “*L’Chaim*” myself, but such serious imbibing needs some explanation!

Sociologists may point to the wisdom of a system which mandates the

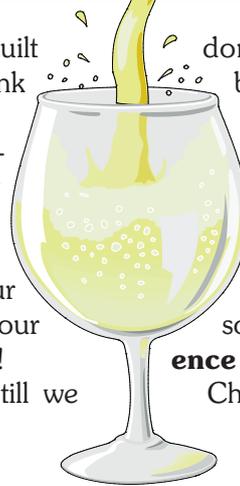
release of tensions that have built up over the year, but I think they’re missing the point.

We spend most of our waking hours thinking we know right from wrong. We sit in judgment on people and on issues. In the courtrooms of our minds we try our friends, our spouses and humanity at large!

When we drink on Purim till we

don’t know the difference between “Haman the accursed and Mordechai the blessed,” we are admitting that there is only One Judge, and all our efforts to judge the world are like those of someone “under the **affluence of incohol!**”

Cheers!



RABBI REUVEN SUBAR

*“And it was in the days of”
a Turnabout Man
(I don’t mean his feet smelled
and that his nose ran)
This barn-boy born
In old Babylon
In the flip of a coin
became Shah of Iran.
His Destiny, Manifest,
seemed like a sign.
He honored himself
in a party of Wine.*

*His name, Achashverosh,
Globally hated
(To say it your throat
must be well-lubricated).
From above the Great Sea,
From Kush to Hindie, he ruled
Yet his hunger was scarcely half-sated.
“One last coup d’etate,
then dominion is Mine!”
But Vashti was set
on her own feast of Wine.*

*This King was a Jack
With an Ace in his boot
But his Queen was unsuited,
She would not follow suit.
She drew clubs.
Then spades threw earth on the grave
Where she faded;*

*She, who like diamonds did shine
And the heart of the King
was merry with Wine.*

*And at last, one long and wintry night,
A princess appeared,
dressed in plain white.
When the King picked this shoot
From the tree of twelve roots
She was balm for the poisonous snake,
Aggagite,
Who hate had eaten a hole in his mind
Then,
the King and Haman
sat down to drink Wine.*

*“Where the sticker bush was,
the myrtle will thrive”
(It’s a verse in Isaiah, fifty-five)
Meaning: “Esther, the Myrtle,
Will leap every hurdle —
And Mordechai too
That unbending Jew.*

*“Haman & Sons” go bankrupt and hang
(Dangling modifiers
describe well that gang)
Bad finally loses to Good
Sweet things grow
where yucky ones stood.
At last Chaos admits design;
And vineyards in Israel ripen with Wine.*

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MEGILLAMAN

Rabbi Pinchas Kantrowitz

With overstuffed backpack, Bernie stood ready to pay the clerk of the Cambridge Youth Hostel and leave. “Did you do your duty?” the clerk asked. “My duty? Well, I never served in the army but...” The clerk held out a broom. “Sweep room number seven.”

Just my luck — thinks Bernie looking into room seven — There’s a big lug fixing his backpack right in the middle of the floor. “Ahem! ...excuse me, would you mind moving aside for a minute so I can... Hey, Jake? Is that you? I can’t believe it! I’ve been looking all over Europe for you! Didn’t you get my letter in Rome? In Athens? I sent one to Paris, too!” “I changed my itinerary,” said Jake. “But what about you? Did you get my letters in Brussels and London?” “No. I changed my itinerary, too! Wow! Here we are in the very same youth hostel, and if not for that clerk telling me to sweep room seven we’d never have met!”

A Jew is obligated to write his own Megillas Esther. So teaches the great contemporary sage Rabbi Sholmo Wolbe. On the surface, Megillas Esther is a wonderful children’s tale; but look deeper and you’ll find a sophisticated tapestry of hidden miracles, interwoven with the deliverance of the Jewish people and the retribution against their nefarious enemy. So too, we must study our own lives to see the hidden miracles, to follow the thread that Hashem weaves, guiding us towards our personal destiny.

Or as Bernie put it, “You know Jake, sometimes I feel like we’re being watched.”



Created by Rabbi Mordechai Becher • Illustrated by David Podbere

TOP 10 WAYS TO KNOW WHEN YOU’VE DRUNK ENOUGH

1. YOU THINK THAT THE TOP TEN LIST IS FUNNY.
2. YOU COMBUST SPONTANEOUSLY.
3. YOU HAVE A NIGHTMARE THAT YOU ARE AWAKE.
4. YOU DREAM THAT YOU ARE ASLEEP.
5. YOU BEGIN SPEAKING YIDDISH WITH A SEPHARDIC ACCENT.
6. YOU ASK PEOPLE HOW MANY CANDLES THEY LIT LAST NIGHT.
7. YOU THINK THAT THE CALVE’S FOOT JELLY IS DESSERT.
8. YOU FORGET TO OPEN YOUR EYES AND INSTEAD GROPE AROUND FOR THE LIGHT SWITCH. YOU FINALLY FIND THE LIGHT SWITCH, FLICK IT OFF AND SAY “THERE.”
9. YOU ARGUE WITH HAMEN-TASHEN... AND LOSE.
10. YOU HOLD A VOLUME OF THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD UPSIDE DOWN, THINKING “HEY, THEY FINALLY DECODED THE HUMAN GENOME!”

L A W S A N D C U S T O M S O F

P U R I M

TIMES

- Purim is preceded by the Fast of Esther, which begins at dawn on the 13th of Adar and continues until nightfall. When the 13th is on Shabbat (like this year) the Fast of Esther is observed on the preceding Thursday. It is forbidden to eat and drink on this day (one may, however, wash, and wear leather shoes).
- In unwalled cities, Purim is celebrated on the 14th of Adar, from night to night.
- In cities with walls dating from the days of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of Adar, as it was in Shushan, the capital of Persia; hence the name, Shushan Purim. Jerusalem is a walled city and most of its suburbs are also considered part of Jerusalem regarding this law.

READING OF THE SCROLL OF ESTHER

Kriat Hamegillah

- The Scroll of Esther is read publicly in the evening and on the morning of Purim.
- It must be read from a scroll written in accordance with Halachah.
- The reader and the audience must have intent to fulfil the *mitzvah* of reading and to fulfil the obligation of the blessings before and after.
- It is customary to make noise when the name of Haman is mentioned.
- It is forbidden to speak from the time of the blessings before the reading, until the end of the blessings after the reading.
- Ideally the scroll should be read in the presence of a *minyán*.

PRAYER

Tefillah

- The prayer '*al hanissim*' is added in the Silent Prayer (*Shmoneh Esrei*) and in Grace after Meals.
- If one forgot '*al hanissim*' one does not repeat the prayer.
- During the morning service (*shacharit*), the Torah is read.
- The prayer of repentance, *tachanun*, is not recited, nor is the prayer *lame-natzach*.

GIFTS TO FRIENDS

Mishloach Manot

- One is obligated to give at least one gift to one fellow Jew. The more the better.
- The gift must consist of at least two items of food, ready to eat.
- It is preferable to send the gift via a third party.

GIFTS TO THE POOR

Matanot Le'evyonim

- One is obligated to give a gift of money, sufficient for one meal, to at least two poor people. The more the better.
- Funds must be available on the day of Purim. (No post-dated checks.)
- It is preferable to take care of this obligation early in the day.
- The gift may be given to a third party in order to distribute on the day of Purim.
- More should be spent on gifts to the poor than on gifts to friends (unless they are also poor).

THE FESTIVE MEAL

Seudat Purim

- It is obligatory to partake of a festive meal on the day of Purim.
- It is customary to eat food with seeds — e.g., *Hamentashen* with poppy seed filling.
- One should drink more wine than one is accustomed to.
- It is correct to invite guests, especially the needy.
- The conversation should be focused on words of Torah.

CUSTOMS

Minhagim

- Many have a custom to dress up in costumes.
- It is customary to give charity to all who ask.
- Some produce amusing Purim plays.
- Some also present amusing *diivreit* Torah.
- It is customary to visit the homes of one's Rabbis and teachers.
- One should start studying the laws of Passover on Purim.
- It is correct not to engage in business or work on Purim.
- At the afternoon service before Purim it is customary to give three coins (preferable with the number $\frac{1}{2}$ on them) to charity in memory of the three "half-shekels" given to the Temple.

P U R I M T I M E L I N E

3338 (422 BCE)

- Destruction of 1st Temple - Tisha B'Av
- Nebuchadnezzar
- Jeremiah, Ezekiel
- Prophecies of destruction and exile, Prophecies of return
- Babylonian Exile, Daniel and Ezra

3387 (373 BCE)

- Proclamation of Cyrus, Return to Israel
- Persian Empire
- Minority returns with Nehemiah in Nissan

3389 (371 BCE)

- Foundations laid for Second Temple
- Medes Empire

3390 (370 BCE)

- Achashverosh (or Cambyses, Cyrus's son) stops construction

3391 (369 BCE)

- Banquet in Shushan using vessels of Temple

3395 (365 BCE)

- Cyrus dies, Achashverosh becomes sole ruler

3401 (359 BCE)

- Renewal of settlement in Israel, including Golan and East Bank

3408 (352 BCE)

- Purim — Mordechai and Esther
- Second Temple completed 70 years after destruction
- The Great Assembly, Shimon HaTzadik
- Alexander of Macedon
- Establishment of Prayers, End of Prophecy