

OHRNET

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The Last Laugh

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

When Sir Donald Wolfit, 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 disaster 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:

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Teruma

Hashem commands Moshe to build a Mishkan (Sanctuary) and supplies him with detailed instructions. Bnei Yisrael are asked to contribute precious metals and stones, fabrics, skins, oil and spices. In the Mishkan's outer courtyard is an altar for the burnt offerings and a laver for washing. The Tent of Meeting is divided by a curtain into two chambers. The outer chamber is accessible only to the kohanim, the descendants of Aharon. This contains the table of showbreads, the menorah, and the golden altar for incense. The innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, may be entered only by the kohen gadol, and only once a year, on Yom Kippur. Here is the ark that held the Ten Commandments inscribed on the two tablets of stone which Hashem gave to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai. All of the utensils and vessels, as well as the construction of the Mishkan, are described in great detail.

Tetzaveh

Hashem tells Moshe to command the Jewish People to supply pure olive oil for the menorah in the Mishkan (Tent of Meeting). He also tells Moshe to organize the making of the bigdei kehuna (priestly garments): A breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, a sash, a forehead-plate, and linen trousers. Upon their completion, Moshe is

to perform a ceremony for seven days to consecrate Aharon and his sons. This includes offering sacrifices, dressing Aharon and his sons in their respective garments, and anointing Aharon with oil. Hashem commands that every morning and afternoon a sheep be offered on the altar in the Mishkan. This offering should be accompanied by a meal-offering and libations of wine and oil. Hashem commands that an altar for incense be built from acacia wood and covered with gold. Aharon and his descendants should burn incense on this altar every day. Hashem tells Moshe to command the Jewish People to supply pure olive oil for the menorah in the Mishkan (Tent of Meeting). He also tells Moshe to organize the making of the bigdei kehuna (priestly garments): A breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, a sash, a forehead-plate, and linen trousers. Upon their completion, Moshe is to perform a ceremony for seven days to consecrate Aharon and his sons. This includes offering sacrifices, dressing Aharon and his sons in their respective garments, and anointing Aharon with oil. Hashem commands that every morning and afternoon a sheep be offered on the altar in the Mishkan. This offering should be accompanied by a meal-offering and libations of wine and oil. Hashem commands that an altar for incense be built from acacia wood and covered with gold. Aharon and his descendants should burn incense on this altar every day.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

REMEMBERING THE LAND — PURIM

Purim is not celebrated on the same day everywhere. In walled cities, we are told in Megillat Esther, the celebration is on the 15th of Adar, while in cities without walls it is on the 14th.

The reason for this is that in the unwalled cities, the Jews overcame their enemies on the 13th of Adar and celebrated on the 14th, while in the walled capital of Shushan the battle still raged on the 14th, and the Jews there could not celebrate their victory until the 15th. Therefore, all walled cities celebrate Purim on the 15th because of their similarity to Shushan.

The designation "walled city" does not depend on a city's present situation, but rather on whether it had a wall at the time Joshua led the Jewish nation in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. But why is Joshua's time the criterion for the designation "walled city?" Wouldn't it have been more logical to make this determination based on the time of the Purim miracle?

The answer is found in the Jerusalem Talmud where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi declares that this was done in order to

accord honor to Eretz Yisrael which lay desolate at the time of the Persian miracle.

Rabbi Nissan ben Reuven (Ran) explains this as follows: At the time of the Purim miracle there were hardly any cities in Eretz Yisrael with their walls still intact. Had the determination of "walled city" been made according to the situation at that time, almost all cities in Eretz Yisrael would have the status of unwalled cities. To avoid this disgrace, it was decided to base the status "walled city" on the situation of the city at the time of Joshua. This made many more cities in Eretz Yisrael eligible for this distinction.

Rabbi Yosef Karo (Beis Yosef) has a different approach. Our Sages wanted some memory of Eretz Yisrael in the celebration of this miracle which took place in a foreign land. In the spirit of "zecher lemikdash" — those laws and customs we follow to recall the Beit Hamikdash — the Sages linked the determination of "walled city" to Eretz Yisrael so that the Jews living abroad would not forget their holy land.

• Megillah 2a



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Teruma

A SWELL PARTY

“Let them (the children of Israel) take for Me a portion.” (25:1)

“What a great wedding this is! The food! The flowers! The bridesmaids’ dresses! (Was that real silk?!)”

“Ah - this is nothing. You should have come to the wedding I went to last week. This guy wanted to make some impression I’ll tell ya! He rented the Space Shuttle and the ceremony was performed while the bride and groom were floating in outer space wearing spacesuits!

“Wow! That must have been great.”

“Yeah - it was okay, but somehow there was no atmosphere...”

All the preparations for a wedding are for one purpose only — to bring simcha to the chatan (groom) and kallah (bride). But there are those who focus on the trappings and miss the essence, those who come only to eat and drink, and ignore the essential point. Similarly this world is no more than a wedding-hall bedecked with food and flowers and streamers and musicians. All for one purpose. To bring the chatan and kallah together. That the soul of Man be wedded to the Creator. But there are those who wander through life like guests at a wedding banquet, picking up a chicken drumstick here and an egg-roll there, and completely miss the point. “Let them (the Children of Israel) take for Me a portion.” Let them separate themselves from what is superficial and superfluous in life and connect themselves constantly to the essence. To wed themselves constantly to the Divine Presence.

• Adapted from *Degel Machane Efraim*

Tetzaveh

A SILENT BROADCAST

“Upon it shall Aaron bring the spice incense in smoke, every morning, when he cleans the lamps, he shall bring it up in smoke.” (30:7)

To influence people — spend billions of dollars on advertising campaigns! Pound out the message from every television, every hour on the hour! Write everything in sky-writing! Or in Broadway lights, 20-foot high...

This may be true when the message itself is false: Maybe the little blue stripes won’t keep your teeth looking brighter; maybe you won’t lose all that weight by just eating the corn flakes package... But when the message is the Truth, then it doesn’t have to be trumpeted to the skies. It has a power to sell itself.

In the Beit Hamikdash the service of burning the incense — the ketoret — was performed in private, away from public eyes — yet its scent could be detected as far away as Jericho, over twenty miles away!

When a person puts all his effort into living correctly, in accordance with the Torah, then, even though he may not broadcast his virtues, people will beat a path to his door. His life may be a quiet understatement, but all his actions will radiate an inner purity and holiness like a beacon.

• Based on Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt”l

תג פורים שמחה
Happy Purim!

The Last Laugh continued from page one

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 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’alot, 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.

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.

BEYOND THE BEYOND

The Torah imperative to go beyond the letter of the law in reaching compromises was discussed in an earlier issue (Bava Kama 10a). Our gemara cites the following passage in Mishlei (2:20) to develop an even higher standard of going “beyond the letter of the law”:

“That you shall walk in the ways of the good people and observe the course of the righteous.”

The application of this lofty standard is the guidance which the Sage Rav gave to his disciple Rabbah bar Bar Chanah. The latter had hired movers to transfer some barrels of wine from one place to another. As a result of their negligence the barrels fell and broke. Since he had suffered a significant loss because of them he confiscated some garments belonging to them as payment. When they came to plead before Rav he instructed his disciple to return the garments. Asked if this was a legal requirement on his part despite the fact that the movers were indebted to him for destroying his wine, Rav replied that this was expected of him as a fulfillment of “to walk in the ways of the good.”

But these movers were not content with this gesture of going beyond the letter of the law. After receiving their garments in return they once again pleaded with Rav that they had worked so hard all day moving the wine barrels and were now left with no wages to purchase food to still their hunger. When Rav instructed his disciple to pay them their undeserved wages he was once again asked if this was a legal requirement. This time Rav quoted the second half of the above passage urging one to “observe the course of the righteous.” Since King Solomon had already urged going beyond the letter of the law in the first half of the passage, Rav concluded that the second half was a call to go even “beyond that beyond” in showing consideration for others.

• *Bava Metzia 83a*

TURNING DROSS INTO GOLD

How important it is for Torah scholars to reach out to those who did not have the opportunity to learn Torah finds expression in the gemara’s description of the Heavenly reward for one who teaches Torah to the son of one who is ignorant of Torah and was therefore denied a Torah education. He will have such merit, says Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Rav, that even if Hashem issues a punitive decree He annuls it because of this teacher of Torah.

The source cited for this is a passage in Yirmiyahu 15:19:

“If you shall extract something precious from something cheap you shall be like My mouth.”

Transforming an unlearned person into a Torah scholar, says the prophet in the name of Hashem, will give the teacher’s mouth the same power, as it were, as that of his creator and enables him to annul Heavenly decrees.

An interesting twist in interpreting this passage is presented by one of the great commentaries, Rabbi Yashayahu Pento (RYAP). He raises a problem in regard to this special reward which seems to be limited to the tzaddik (righteous person) who turns an ignorant student into a Torah scholar. Elsewhere (Mo’ed Katan 16b) our Sages teach us that every tzaddik has the power of annulling an adverse decree of Hashem. What then, he asks, is the unique reward of this particular tzaddik?

His solution to this problem is based on a careful analysis of the subtle difference in the text of the two seemingly contradictory statements. In the case of every tzaddik we read that he has the power to annul the Heavenly decree, while in regard to the Torah-teaching tzaddik it is stated that Hashem annuls the decree because of his merit.

This, then, is the crucial difference between the two. Every tzaddik has the power to have a Heavenly decree annulled by imploring Hashem to do so. The Torah-teaching tzaddik need not even open his mouth to make such a request. The meaning of the word “ke’fee” in the above-cited passage is therefore to be interpreted as “like the mouth of the tzaddik” and not like the mouth of the Creator. Turning dross into gold by teaching Torah to someone who did not have a Torah background bestows upon one such merit that he achieves, without requesting it, the same powerful effect of decree annulment as does the request coming from the mouth of any tzaddik.

• *Bava Metzia 85a*

FEET FIRST INVITATION

Three tales of hospitality to strangers are related in the early chapters of the Torah: Avraham invites three disguised angels to his home in Alonei Mamre; his nephew Lot invites two of them to his home in Sodom; and Lavan invites Yitzchak’s servant Eliezer.

Both Lot and Lavan ask their guests to first enter their homes and then wash their weary feet (Bereishet 19:2 and 24:32). Avraham, on the other hand, says to his guests: “Let some water be brought to wash your feet and then you can relax beneath the tree” (Bereishet 18:14). This deviation from the norm of hospitality by making the washing of the feet a precondition to entering his home led our Sages to conclude that Avraham suspected these strangers of being Arabs who used to worship the dust of their feet. Since he did not wish to have anything worshipped as idolatry enter his home he asked them to wash their feet before entering.

The angels whom he thus suspected, says Rabbi Yannai, sensed that he had thus misjudged them and declared: “You suspected us of being Arabs who bow to the dust of their feet? From you there has come Yishmael!”

Although this statement does not appear in the Torah, it is implied, explains Maharsha, by the fact that Avraham was affected with a son who was the father of an Arab nation which would indulge in the idolatry of which he suspected them. This

continued on page five

Teruma

1. How many types of items were the Jews to donate?
2. The donation of silver for the mishkan differed from the donation of the other items. How?
3. What property do techelet and argaman share that orot eilim m'adamim do not share?
4. What property do the above three share that shesh and orot techashim do not share?
5. Onkelos translates "tachash" as "sasgona." Why?
6. What kind of trees did Yaakov plant in Egypt?
7. Describe two uses of: a) oil; b) spices; c) jewels.
8. The aron was made with three boxes, one inside the other. Exactly how tall was the outer box?
9. Why is the Torah referred to as "testimony"?
10. What did the faces of the keruvim resemble?
11. On what day of the week was the lechem hapanim baked?
12. What does miksha mean?
13. What was the purpose of the menorah's gevi'im (cups)?
14. How did Moshe know the shape of the menorah?
15. What designs were embroidered into the tapestries of the mishkan?
16. What is meant by "standing wood"?
17. How long was the mishkan?
18. How wide was the interior of the mishkan?
19. Why was the altar coated with nechoshet?
20. Which function did the copper yeteidot serve?

Answers to Teruma's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 25:2 - 13.
2. 25:3 - No fixed amount of the other items was required. The silver was given as a fixed amount: A half shekel.
3. 25:4,5 - They are wool, orot eilim are not.
4. 25:4,5 - They are dyed; shesh and orot techashim are not.
5. 25:5 - The tachash delights (sas) in its multi-colors (g'vanim).
6. 25:5 - Arazim — cedars.
7. 25:6-7 - a) The oil was lit in the menorah and used for anointing. b) The spices were used in the anointing oil and for the incense. c) The precious stones were for the ephod and the choshen.
8. 25:11 - The outer box was one and a half amot plus a tefach plus a little bit, because it rose a little bit above the kaporet. (The kaporet was a tefach thick — see 25:17).
9. 25:16 - It testifies that Hashem commanded us to keep the mitzvot.
10. 25:18 - The faces of children.
11. 25:29 - Friday.
12. 25:31 - Hammered.
13. 25:31 - Purely ornamental.
14. 25:40 - Hashem showed Moshe a menorah of fire.
15. 26:1 - On one side a lion; on the other side an eagle.
16. 26:15 - The wooden beams were to be upright and not stacked one upon the other.
17. 26:16 - 30 amot.
18. 26:23 - 10 amot.
19. 27:2 - To atone for brazenness.
20. 27:19 - They secured the curtains against the wind.

WEEKLY DAFootnotes continued from page four

is based on what our Sages taught us (Mesechta Yoma 19b) that one who unjustly suspects another, who is really innocent, will be afflicted physically, as Moshe was stuck with tzara'at (a spiritual leprosy-like affliction) for suspecting that the Children of Israel would not believe him that Hashem had sent him to liberate them from Egyptian bondage (Shmot 4:1,6).

• *Bava Metzia 86b*

THE DIPLOMACY OF HOSPITALITY

“Say little and do much.” This is the counsel offered by the Sage Shammai in Pirkei Avot (1:15). In our gemara Rabbi Elazar tells us that it is indeed the way of the righteous. The model for such behavior is Avraham.

When he was visited by the three disguised angels Avraham ignored his post-circumcision weakness and demonstrated his classical hospitality. When they hesitated to enter his home because of his condition he entreated them with an invitation in which all he offered them was, besides an opportunity to wash and rest a bit, that “I will bring you some bread” (Bereishet 18:5). No sooner did they accept this modest invitation than

Avraham began preparing a sumptuous feast which began with his running towards three animals whose tongues flavored with mustard would provide a delicate dish for his guests.

Thus the Torah teaches us the importance of saying little and doing much which is the way of the righteous. This is in sharp contrast to the way of the wicked which is to say much and do little. The model for the negative behavior is the Hittite Ephron from whom Avraham purchased the Machpela Cave in Hebron as a burial plot for his wife Sarah. After first refusing payment from Avraham with the boastful statement of “What is a land worth 400 silver Shekel between you and me!” he ended up insisting on a heavy price (Bereishet 23:15-16).

But what is the reason for offering little in the way of hospitality if everything really depends on what ends up being done for the guest?

Maharsha explains that a guest is often reluctant to accept an invitation to hospitality for fear that he is imposing on a generous host. It is therefore wise for the host to play down what he intends to do for his guest in order to put him at ease. After the guest has accepted the invitation of “little said,” the host has the opportunity, like Avraham, to deliver “much done” hospitality.

• *Bava Metzia 87a*

PARSHA Q&A ?

Tezaveh

1. What two precautions were taken to assure the purity of oil for the menorah?
2. How was Aharon commanded to kindle the menorah?
3. What does tamid mean in reference to the menorah?
4. What does kehuna mean?
5. Name the eight garments worn by the kohen gadol.
6. To what does Rashi compare the ephod?
7. In which order were the names of the Tribes inscribed on the ephod?
8. The stones of the ephod bore the inscription of the names of the sons of Yaakov. Why?
9. For what sins did the choshen mishpat atone?
10. What are three meanings of the word mishpat?
11. What was lacking in the bigdei kehuna in the second Beit Hamikdash?
12. Which garment's fabric was woven of only one material?
13. When the kohen gadol wore all his priestly garments, where on his head was the tefillin situated?
14. What does the word tamid mean in reference to the tzitz? (two answers)
15. Which garments were worn by a kohen hediot?
16. During the inauguration of the kohanim, a bullock was brought as a sin offering. For what sin did this offering atone?
17. Moshe was commanded to wash Aharon and his sons to prepare them to serve as kohanim (29:4). How were they washed?
18. What was unique about the bull sin-offering brought during the inauguration of the kohanim?
19. How did the oil used for the meal-offering differ from the oil used for the menorah?
20. What does the crown on the mizbe'ach haketoret symbolize?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Tezaveh's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 27:20 - The olives were pressed and not ground; and only the first drop was used.
2. 27:20 - He was commanded to kindle it until the flame ascended by itself.
3. 27:20 - It means that it should be kindled every night.
4. 28:3 - Service.
5. 28:4,36,42 - Choshen, ephod, me'il, ketonet, mitznefet, avnet, tzitz, and michnasayim.
6. 28:6 - A woman's riding garment.
7. 28:10 - In order of birth.
8. 28:12 - So that Hashem would see their names and recall their righteousness.
9. 28:15 - For judicial errors.
10. 28:15 - 1) The claims of the litigants; 2) The court's ruling; 3) The court's punishment.
11. 28:30 - The Urim V'Tumim - the "Shem Ha'meforash" placed in the folds of the choshen.
12. 28:31 - The fabric of the me'il was made only of techelet.
13. 28:37 - Between the tzitz and the mitznefet.
14. 28:38 - 1) It always atones, even when not being worn; 2) The kohen gadol must always be aware that he is wearing it.
15. 28:40,42 - Ketonet, avnet, migba'at, and michnasayim.
16. 29:1 - The sin of the golden calf.
17. 29:4 - They immersed in a mikveh.
18. 29:14 - It is the only external sin-offering that was completely burned.
19. 29:40 - Oil for the menorah comes only from beaten olives. Oil for meal-offerings may come from either beaten olives or from ground-up olives.
20. 30:3 - The crown of kehuna.

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LETTER PERFECT

From: Michael Willen, MD in Slingerlands, NY

Dear Rabbi,

In the Book of Esther, why are certain letters in the names of Haman's sons written so much smaller than the others and why are some letters in the text (such as a tav towards the end of the book) larger than the others?

Dear Dr. Michael Willen,

In Megillat Esther, and elsewhere in the Torah, you find several places where a letter is written slightly larger or slightly smaller than the other letters. This is an ancient tradition, and the reason for each instance isn't always explained.

The particular ones you mentioned (Esther 9:7,9) aren't explained in any classical sources. Recently, however, it has been discovered that these letters, which occur in the section describing the hanging deaths of Haman's ten sons, may contain an uncanny hint to the Nuremberg trials in which ten Nazis were tried and hung for their anti-Semitic crimes, as follows:

As you may know, the Jewish calendar year is represented by Hebrew letters. The small letters in the names of Haman's ten sons are: tav, shin and zain. The large letter is "vav." These letters represent the year 707 ("tav shin zain" equal 707) of the sixth millennium (represented by the large "vav" which equals 6). Thus you have the Jewish date 5707, or 1946 by the civil calendar. On the first of October, 1946 - 6 Tishrei 5707 on the Jewish calendar - the Nuremberg Military Tribunal tried ten Nazis and sentenced them to death by hanging for their modern "Hamanism." One of them, the notorious Julius Streiker, even cried "Purim-Fest 1946" as his cryptic last words.

Sources:

- *The Jewish Observer*, March 1986, pp. 56-57

TAKE A BOW

**From: Ari Trachtenberg,
University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign**

Dear Rabbi,

I am thinking about taking a class in Tae Kwan Do this semester to get some exercise. After sitting in on the first class, it seems that there is a lot of bowing involved, in addition to various "spiritual" lessons: Students are supposed to bow to the training room, to each other, to the instructor.

The instructor told me that this bowing is a typical gesture of respect, that it is bi-directional (instructors bow to students too), and is not a supplication. Given the Purim story, however, I am hesitant to participate in this class. Do you know of any conflicts between this type of martial art and Judaism? I appreciate your time, and thanks for the great "Ask the Rabbi" column!

Dear Ari Trachtenberg,

Bowing to people as a gesture of respect is perfectly okay. Abraham bowed to his guests (Genesis 18:2), the brothers bowed to Joseph (Genesis 42:6) and Moses bowed to his father-in-law (Exodus 18:6). So if Tae Kwan Do bowing is nothing more than a gesture of respect toward others, I see no problem with it. If however, they are bowing to an object or the room that would be forbidden.

Why then in the Purim episode did Mordechai refuse to bow to Haman? The Midrash answers that Haman claimed divine powers for himself. He even went so far as to attach an idolatrous icon to his clothing. Under these circumstances, bowing to him was tantamount to bowing to an idol.

Sources:

- *Rashi on Megillat Esther 3:2*
- *Ibn Ezra, ibid.*

PUBLIC DOMAIN _____ Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: The Merchant of Vegas (Ohrnet Mishpatim)

Today's Ask the Rabbi reminds me an old joke. A Jew asks his Rabbi if one can play Poker on Shabbat. And the Rabbi says: The way YOU play, it should be forbidden even on weekdays!

- *Andre Mermelstein, Sao Paulo, Brazil*

In regards to the story of the Chofetz Chaim on gambling vs. the Stock Market, one can lose money when a stock goes up. This is when he or she sells a stock short and this is common nowadays. It was probably not common practice in the Chofetz Chaim's time. So this explanation does not really hold in this time and day. On the other hand you can argue

that those who sell short really are gamblers. Thank you.

- *Dan A. Kaufman M.D., New York, NY*

Those investors who sold short, i.e., they gambled that the stock would go down so they sold shares they did not own at the current high price expecting to then be able to buy them at the lower price, will have lost if the stock goes up. Perhaps, in the times and country of the Chofetz Chaim, such a facility was not available. Since this ability to sell short is available in the US stock exchanges, perhaps, the Chofetz Chaim would not approve of stock investments.

- *Michael Katz*

MEGILAH A.Q

We give you the answers! You give us the questions!

READ THIS: You have to ask questions from Megillas Esther which aptly fit the following answers.

(For example, if we tell you the answer is "127," you must tell us that the question is "How many countries did Achashverosh rule over?" Got it? Good.)

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Woe! | 6. Vashti Dishes | 11. Lots of Luck |
| 2. 180 degrees | 7. Shushan Buoy | 12. History is Boring |
| 3. Arzei Habira | 8. Quiche | 13. Dangling Modifiers |
| 4. Remove both of his shins | 9. Esther | 14. Doll Phone |
| 5. "Here's mud in your eye!" | 10. Dodo | 15. Hummin' |
| | | 16. Because |

QUESTIONS?

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. How do Yemenite Jews pronounce the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which happens to be the first letter in the Megillah)? | port where you can find one? |
| 2. What would you get if every single day of Achashverosh's feast you graduated college? (1:4) | 8. What egg-based luncheon pie sounds like Mordechai's great-grandfather? |
| 3. From where did they get the cedar trees (<i>arzei</i>) to build Shushan Habira? | 9. Who's the only person in the Megillah with an English name? |
| 4. How could you make Achashverosh be called Achavayro? | 10. What word defines Esther's father's relationship to Mordechai? (2:7) |
| 5. Which "toast" did the Medians say to one another before drinking which eventually became the source for the name of their country "Mud-Eye"? (1:3) | 11. What objects did Haman use to determine a date for his plan? |
| 6. What did the Persian queen serve at her party? What didn't she do after the party? | 12. When he couldn't sleep, why did Achashverosh ask for the Book of Remembrances? |
| 7. What Persian flotation device causes lots of confusion when you ask someone at the air- | 13. What kind of adjectives best describe Haman and sons? |
| | 14. What toy did Haman buy to go with his second son's Barbie collection? (9:7) |
| | 15. What joyous vocal expression is appropriate when our idolatrous enemies hang? |
| | 16. Why aren't there 20 questions this week? |

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