



## Purim

GET OUT AND HELP SOMEONE ELSE

*Public Service Is a Critical Part of Life*

# Holiday Overview

## *Purim*

The jolly festival of Purim is celebrated every year on the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month of Adar (late winter/early spring). It commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day," as recorded in the Megillah (biblical book of Esther).

The Persian Empire of the fourth century BCE extended over 127 lands, and all the Jews were its subjects. When King Ahasuerus had his wife, Queen Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders, he arranged a beauty pageant to

find a new queen. A Jewish girl, Esther, found favor in his eyes and became the new queen, though she refused to divulge her background.

Meanwhile, the Jew-hating Haman was appointed prime minister of the empire. Mordecai, the leader of the Jews (and Esther's cousin), defied the king's orders and refused to bow to Haman. Haman was incensed, and he convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all the Jews on the thirteenth day of Adar, a date chosen by a lottery Haman made.

Mordecai galvanized all the Jews, convincing them to

repent, fast, and pray to G d. Meanwhile, Esther asked the king and Haman to join her for a feast. At a subsequent feast, Esther revealed to the king her Jewish identity. Haman was hanged, Mordecai was appointed prime minister in his stead, and a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies.

On the thirteenth of Adar, the Jews mobilized and killed many of their enemies. On the fourteenth of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the capital city of Shushan, they took one more day to finish the job.

# TEXT 1A

*Esther 10:3*

כִּי מֶרְדֵּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי מְשֻׁנָּה לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ וְגָדוֹל  
לַיְּהוּדִים וְרָצוּי לְרַב אֶתְיוֹ, דֹּרֵשׁ טוֹב לַעֲמוֹ וְדֹבֵר שְׁלוֹם  
לְכָל יִרְעוֹ.

For Mordecai the Jew was viceroy to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted by most of his brethren; seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all their seed.

# TEXT 1B

*Rashi, ad loc.*

"לרוב אחיו". ולא לכל אחיו, מלמד שפירשו ממנו  
מקצת סנהדרין, לפי שנעשה קרוב למלכות והיה בטל  
מתלמודו.

“Accepted by most of his brethren.” But not  
by all his brethren, for part of the Sanhedrin  
disassociated from him when he became  
close to the government and neglected his  
studies.

# TEXT 2

*Rabbi Yosef Chaim of  
Baghdad, Ben Yehoyada,  
Megilah 16b*

משם איכא למילף . . . יען דקאמר המיעוט הוא  
דפרשו, אבל הרוב לא סבירא ליה הכי.

From the fact . . . that it states that only a  
minority disassociated, we can infer that the  
majority didn't agree and sided with  
Mordecai.

## QUESTIONS

Was Mordecai's pivot away from pure devotion to the law a good thing (as the majority opinion would seem to suggest), or was it a bad thing (as the minority opinion seems to suggest)?

# TEXT 3

*Talmud, Sanhedrin 29a*

שנים אומרים זכאי ואחד אומר חייב, זכאי. שנים  
אומרים חייב ואחד אומר זכאי, חייב . . . גמרו את  
הדבר, היו מכניסין אותם. הגדול שבדיינים אומר: איש  
פלוני אתה זכאי, איש פלוני אתה חייב.

ומנין לכשיצא לא יאמר "אני מזכה וחבריי מחייבים,  
אבל מה אעשה שחבריי רבו עלי?"

על זה נאמר: "לא תלך רכיל בעמך" (ויקרא יט, טז).  
ואומר: "הולך רכיל מגלה סוד" (משלי יא, ג).

If two judges say exempt from payment and another says liable to pay, the defendant is exempt. If two say liable and one says exempt, the defendant is liable. . . . After finishing the matter and reaching a decision, the judges bring in the litigants. The greatest of the judges says, "So-and-so, you are exempt from paying," or: "So-and-so, you are liable to pay."

From where is it derived that when the judge leaves the courtroom, they may not say, "I deemed you exempt and my colleagues deemed you liable, but what can I do, as my colleagues outnumbered me and consequently you were deemed liable?"

About this it is stated, "You shall not go as a talebearer among your people" (Leviticus 19:16), and it says, "One who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but one who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13).

This is a question for any one of us when faced with the tension of sacrificing time dedicated for personal growth, or to help someone else.

Should we spend that time developing ourselves, be it spiritually, ethically, intellectually, or otherwise? Or are we supposed to give it away to someone else?





# TEXT 4A

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of Reading  
the Shema 2:5*

הָיָה עוֹסֵק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה וְהִגִּיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע, פּוֹסֵק  
וְקוֹרֵא וּמְבַרֵךְ לְפָנֶיהָ וְלֵאחֶרֶיהָ. הָיָה עוֹסֵק בְּצָרְכֵי רַבִּים  
לֹא יִפְסֹק, אֲלָא יִגְמַר עֲסָקִיהֶן וְיִקְרָא, אִם נִשְׁאַר עֵת  
לְקִרְוֹת.

If one is engaged in the study of the Torah and the time has come to read the Shema, they should interrupt studying and read the Shema and recite the blessings before and after it. If one is engaged in public duties, they should not pause, rather complete them, and then read the Shema if there is still time to do so.

# TEXT 4B

*Rabbi Avraham Ben  
Moshe de Buton, Lechem  
Mishneh, ad loc.*

יצא לו . . . [ד]צרכי רבים עדיף מדברי תורה בתורתו  
אומנותו, שהרי . . . בקריאת שמע אפילו מי שתורתו  
אומנותו פוסק, וצרכי רבים אינו פוסק.

It emerges . . . that public need is greater even than exclusive Torah study, for . . . when it comes to reciting the Shema, even one exclusively dedicated to Torah study must interrupt their studies, whereas one engaged in community service should not.

# TEXT 5

Talmud, Sanhedrin 17a

מאי "כלאם"?

אמר ליה: הטל עליהן צרכי ציבור והן כלין מאיליהן.

What is the meaning of the words in the verse, “Imprison them [*kela'em*]” (Numbers 11:28)?

Joshua said to Moses, “Place responsibility for the needs of the public upon them, and they will expire [*kalin*] on their own.”

# TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot  
16, pp. 374–375*

נאכדעם ווי כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדמו"ר איז ארויסגעפארן פון רוסלאנד און אנגעקומען אין ריגא, האט ער דארט פאררופן אן אסיפה פון רבנים, מנהיגים און עסקנים וכו' לטובת די רוסישע אידן. צווישן די איינגעלאדענע איז אויך געווען דער ראגאטשאווער.

ביי דער אסיפה האט מען געוואלט באשטימען א ועד וואס זאל זיך צוזאמענקומען מזמן לזמן און זיך מיישב זיין ווי צו פירן די ארבעט פאר די רוסישע אידן — און מ'האט געבעטן דעם ראגאטשאווער אז ער זאל זיך משתתף זיין אין דעם ועד.

ער האט זיך אבער אפגעזאגט און האט מסביר געווען, אז זיין אריינגיין אין ועד איז תלוי אין א פלוגתא צווישן תלמוד בבלי און ירושלמי.

After the Previous Rebbe was forced to leave Russia and arrived in Riga, Latvia, he once attended a conference of rabbis, community leaders, and activists dedicated to the cause of Russian Jewry. The Rogatchover Ga'on was one of the participants. One of the suggestions at this conference was to establish a committee who would periodically meet and discuss how to best serve Russian Jewry. The Rogatchover was asked to be a part of this committee.

He demurred, stating that the decision to participate is hinged upon an argument between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud.

# TEXT 7A

*Talmud, Berachot 32b*

תנו רבנן: חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה אחת,  
ומתפללין שעה אחת, וחוזרין ושוהין שעה אחת.

וכי מאמר ששוהין תשע שעות ביום בתפלה, תורתן  
היאך משתמרת, ומלאכתם היאך נעשית?

אלא מתוך שחסידים הם — תורתם משתמרת  
ומלאכתן מתברכת.

The sages taught: the early generations of pious men would wait one hour, pray one hour, then wait one hour again.

This raises the question: Since the early pious men would spend nine hours per day engaged in prayer, how is their Torah preserved? And how was their work accomplished?

Rather, because they were pious they merited that their Torah is preserved and their work is blessed.

# TEXT 7B

*Jerusalem Talmud,  
Berachot 5:1*

אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק בֶּן רַבִּי אֱלֵעָזָר: עַל יְדֵי שְׁהִיּוּ חֲסִידִים,  
הָיְתָה בְּרָכָה נִתְּנָה בְּתוֹרָתוֹ וּבְרָכָה נִתְּנָה בְּמַלְאכָתוֹ.

Rabbi Yitzchak ben Rabbi Eleazar said,  
“Because they were pious, their study was  
blessed and their work was blessed.”

# TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot  
16, pp. 374–375*

האט דער ראגשטשאווער אויסגעפירט:

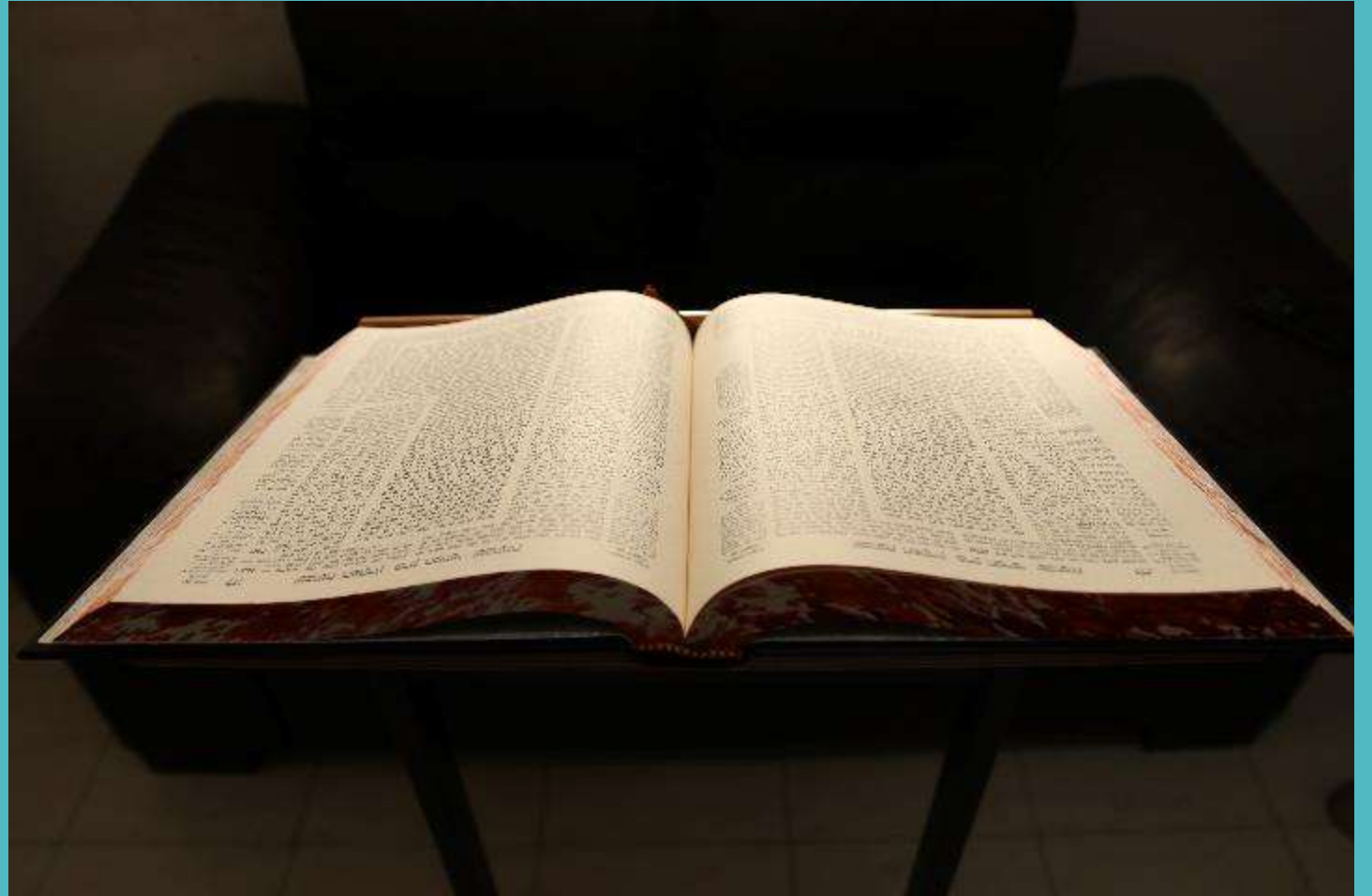
דורך דעם וואס ער וועט זיך באטייליקן אין ועד וועט  
ער מוזן מבטל זיין מזמנו בלימוד התורה. איז לויטן  
ירושלמי . . . וועט אים ניט פעלן אין ידיעת התורה.  
וויבאלד אבער אז הלכה כבבלי, אז ס'איז בלויז  
"תורתם משתמרת", וועט ביי אים פעלן די הוספה אין  
לימוד וידיעת התורה וואס ער וואלט געקענט האבן  
ווען ער לערנט תורה אויך אין די זמנים — און אויף  
דעם קען ער ניט מוותר זיין.

The Rogatchover concluded:

“My participation in this committee will require me to take some time off from my usual Torah study. So, according to the Jerusalem Talmud . . . , it won’t lead to diminishing the sum total of my Torah knowledge.

“But Halachah follows the Babylonian Talmud, which states, ‘Their Torah is preserved.’ Accordingly, I will be losing out on the added Torah study I would have gained while studying during the time now sacrificed to this committee. I cannot give this up.”

This subtle difference of preservation vs. further development matches an overall difference between the Babylonian and Jerusalem disciplines.





# TEXT 9A

*Talmud, Sanhedrin 24a*

"במחשכים הושיבני כמתי עולם" (איכה ג, ו). אמר  
רבי ירמיה: זה תלמודה של בבל.

The verse states, “He has made me dwell in dark places, as those that have been long dead” (Lamentations 3:6). Rabbi Yirmiyah says, “This is the Talmud of Babylonia [which is not as clear as the Talmud of Israel].”

# TEXT 9B

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber  
Schneersohn, Yom Tov  
Shel Rosh Hashanah, 5666,  
pp. 90–92*

דהנה בתלמוד בבלי העיקר הוא הפלפול בריבוי קושיות והעלמות עד שבא על הסברא האמיתית, מה שאין כן תלמוד ירושלמי ברובם הם הלכות פסוקות בלי פלפולים.

דעיקר ענין הפלפול הוא אשר השגה הראשונה שמשיג בהענין הרי הוא מקשה על זה ריבוי קושיות שהן העלמות והסתרים על הגילוי אור ההשגה, עד שבא לגילוי השגה עליונה יותר . . . על ידי היגיעה הרבה והעיון הטוב שמעמיק את עצמו בעצם הענין בהעמקה גדולה ביותר הרי הוא מוצא ההשגה האמיתית בעומק ופנימיות הענין איך ומה הוא, ובזה ממילא סרו כל הקושיות וההעלמות ומאיר אור האמת ביותר זך ובהיר מאד כו' . . .

וזהו "במחשכים הושיבני" זה תלמוד בבל . . . שהלימוד הוא בפלפול בריבוי העלמות והסתרים להאיר מתוך חשיכה דוקא כו'. אבל תלמוד ירושלמי רובם הלכות פסוקות, וטעמי ההלכות כמו שהיה בקבלה, אבל לא בריבוי קושיות כו' . . . ששם אין ההסתר כל כך, בנקל להגיע לאור האמת ואינה צריכה לריבוי קושיות, שהאור היה מאיר להם . . . שאין דבר מסתיר . . . אבל בחוץ לארץ נתלבש אור התורה בכמה לבושים המעלימים, וצריכים לברר להסיר ההעלמות כו', וזהו מעלת תלמוד ירושלמי על תלמוד בבלי.

In the Babylonian Talmudic discipline, the primary objective is the intellectual investigation, asking questions, and dealing with darkness until arriving at the truth. By contrast, the Jerusalem Talmudic discipline is primarily clear-cut Halachic decisions without much investigation.

How does intellectual investigation work? The initial understanding is questioned from all sides, clouding the full revelation of the truth of the matter, and eventually leads to a greater level of understanding. . . . The person must throw themselves into the subject with deep, penetrating analysis and meditation, and thereby reaches the true understanding of the matter—how and what it truly is.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 24a) states as much: “The verse states, ‘He has made me dwell in darkness’ (Lamentations 3:6)—this is a reference to the Babylonian Talmud.” . . . The style of study is associated with abundant investigation and groping in the dark until finally arriving at the light.

By contrast, the Jerusalem Talmud is primarily decisive Halachah as it has been passed down through the generations, but without much investigation. . . . In this discipline, there isn’t much darkness, and so it’s easier to arrive at the bright truth without much investigation. The Israeli sages were privy to much light . . . without any obstructions. . . . But in the Diaspora, the light of Torah was integrated in multiple layers of concealment, and so the student must peel them away. This is the advantage of the Jerusalem Talmud over its Babylonian counterpart.

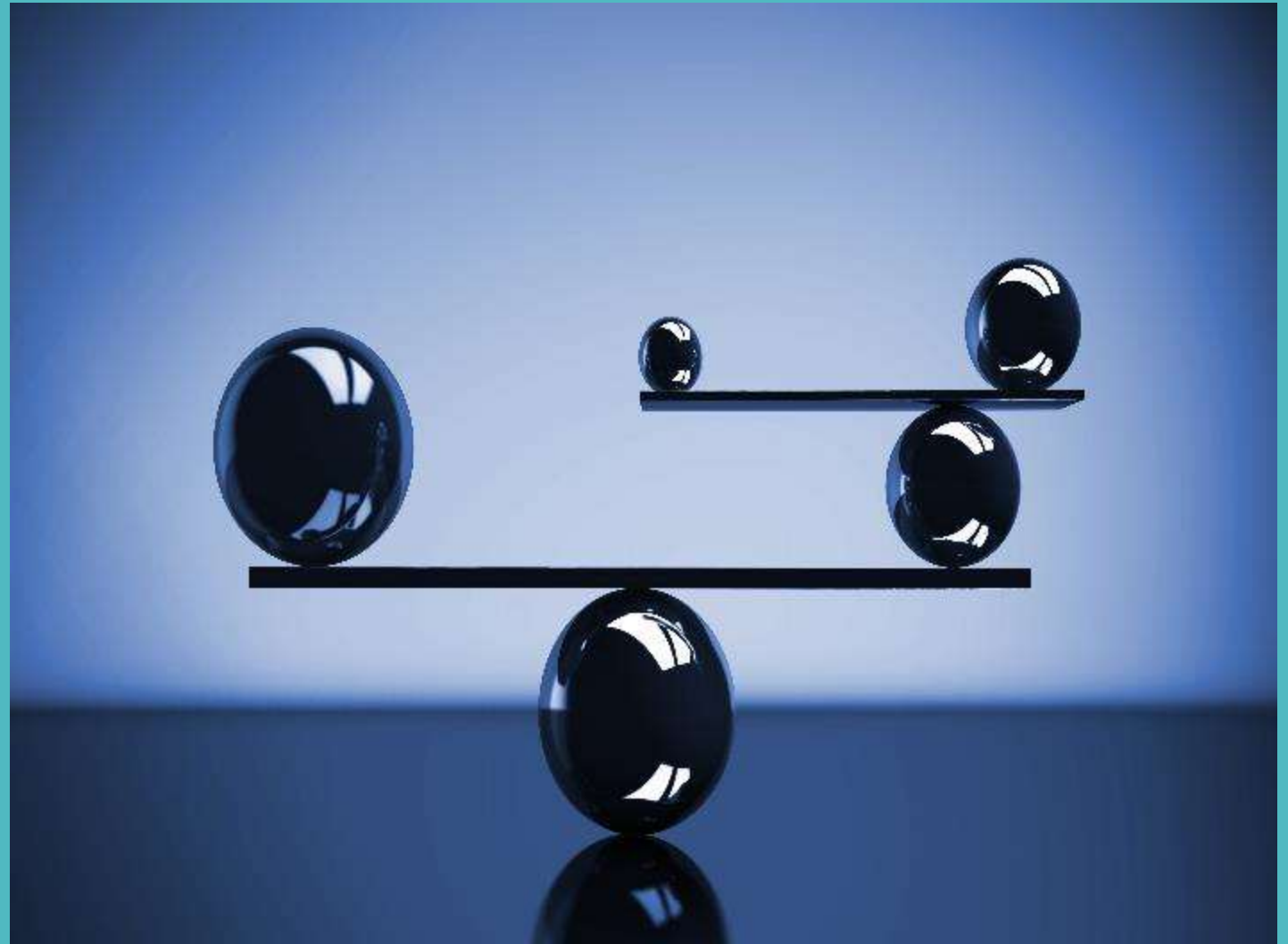
# TEXT 10

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of the  
Sanhedrin 2:8*

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים שְׁמֵבִית דִּין הַגָּדוֹל הָיוּ שׁוֹלְחִים בְּכָל אֶרֶץ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבּוֹדְקִין כָּל מִי שִׁמְצָאוֹהוּ חֲכָם וִירָא חֲטָא וְעָנּוּ  
וְשָׁפוּי וּפְרָקוּ נְאֻם וְרוּם הַבְּרִיּוֹת נוֹחָה הֵימָנוּ, עוֹשִׂין  
אוֹתוֹ דִּין בְּעִירוֹ, וּמִשָּׁם מַעֲלִין אוֹתוֹ לְפֶתַח הַר הַבַּיִת,  
וּמִשָּׁם מַעֲלִין אוֹתוֹ לְפֶתַח הָעֶזְרָה, וּמִשָּׁם מַעֲלִין אוֹתוֹ  
לְבֵית דִּין הַגָּדוֹל.

The Sanhedrin used to send agents throughout Israel to examine candidates for the office of judge. Whoever was found to be wise, sin-fearing, humble, contrite, respectful, and well-liked by people was made judge in his town; from the local court he was promoted to the court situated at the entrance of the Temple Mount; from there he was promoted to the court situated at the entrance of the Temple court; and from there he was promoted to the Supreme Court.

The Israeli majority sided with Mordechai's role, for they appreciated that he could still maintain his level of devotion to the law even with his newfound preoccupation with public service.



# TEXT 11

*Midrash, Eliyahu Rabah,  
ch. 11*

היה להם לסנהדרי גדולה שהניח משה ויהושע ופנחס  
בן אלעזר עמהם, היה להם לילך ולקשור חבלים של  
ברזל במתניהם ולהגביה בגדיהם למעלה  
מארכובותיהן, ויחזרו בכל עיירות ישראל: יום אחד  
ללכיש, יום אחד לבית אל, יום אחד לחברון, יום אחד  
לירושלים, וכן בכל מקומות ישראל, וילמדו את  
ישראל.

Members of the Sanhedrin appointed by  
Moses, Joshua, and Phineas ben Eleazar were  
supposed to tie belts of iron around their  
waists, lift their cloaks above their knees, and  
visit every town in Israel—one day in Lachish,  
another in Beth El, another in Hebron, and  
another in Jerusalem, and really  
everywhere—and teach the people Torah.

# TEXT 12

*Maimonides, Mishneh  
Torah, Laws of the  
Sanhedrin 14:11–13*

אין דנין דיני נפשות אלא בפני הבית, והוא שיהיה בית  
דין הגדול שם בלשכה שבמקדש.

Cases involving capital punishment are adjudicated only when the Temple is standing. It is also necessary that the High Court hold its sessions in the Chamber of Hewn Stone in the Temple. . . .

# TEXT 13A

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot  
16, pp. 379–380*

און דאס איז די הוראה פון הנהגת מרדכי פאר אונז  
בנוגע לפועל: . . .

עס פאדערט זיך פון אונז א הנהגה — מעין און על כל  
פנים שמץ מינהו פון הנהגת מרדכי, צו ווערן א "משנה  
למלך", כדי צו זיין א "דורש טוב לעמו ודובר שלום  
לכל זרעו". און הגם אז די הנהגה איז ביי כמה וכמה  
פארבונדן מיט א "ירידה", ווארום מ'דארף צוליב דעם  
מוותר זיין אויף דער אייגענע שלימות — איז כדאי די  
ירידה צוליב דער תועלת וטובת הרבים.

Here's the message from Mordecai's behavior  
for all of us, practically speaking: . . .

We must all emulate, at least in some minor  
way, Mordecai's behavior and commit to  
becoming "viceroy to the king" so as to "seek  
the good of his people and speak peace to all  
their seed."

Though such a commitment will demand  
sacrifices for many, forcing them to forgo  
perfecting their own personal affairs, the  
sacrifice is justified by the greater good that  
comes out of it.

If you're not dedicating any time to someone else's needs, citing your own personal matters as an excuse, then something is wrong.





# TEXT 13B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Ibid., p. 380*

אויב עס פאדערט זיך די הנהגה פון מרדכי בנוגע צו  
דער הצלה פון אידישע גופים, על אחת כמה וכמה אז  
עס דארף אזוי זיין ווען עס קומט צו דער הצלה פון  
אידישע נשמות — אז מ'דארף אפלייגן די אייגענע  
שלימות צוליב "הצלת נפשות".

If Mordecai's behavior is called for when it comes to saving the Jewish body, certainly we must adopt this approach when it comes to saving another Jewish soul. We must sacrifice our own personal perfection to save another Jewish soul.

It's the example we learn from Mordechai: Life isn't only about reaching the apex of personal perfection and fulfillment. It's also about helping and sacrificing for someone else. And ironically, that itself is the apex of human achievement.



## KEY POINTS

1. After the Purim story, Mordecai migrated from a life wholly dedicated to Torah study at the Sanhedrin to public service in Persian politics. Some of his colleagues disagreed with this decision.
2. They didn't disagree in principle, rather in practice: they couldn't bring themselves to come on board.
3. The divergent approaches hinge upon a Babylon/Israel split vis-à-vis the question of: Will I lose anything by sacrificing my time to help someone else? The former says ultimately, "Yes, a little," while the latter says, "Not at all."
4. We follow the Israeli Talmudic approach: there's no reason to ever hold back from helping someone else, regardless of the importance of your personal gains.
5. If your life is entirely self-centered without any elements of public service, try changing that right now.

