

B”H

The Secret of the Golden Scepter HaRav Ofer Erez shlit”a

Rabbi Natan writes in Likutey Halachot that Book of Esther is an aspect of *Sipurey Ma’asiot* (stories) from ancient times. *Sipurey Ma’asiot* are the Torah of the Ancient Hidden One, deep and very inner Torah, which dresses itself in a simple story, and in our case, a historical story which happened in the history of the Jewish people. Really, this is a true story and all its details are accurate, only that there are hidden within it great secrets.

One of the events which happens in the story of Esther is that Mordechai sends Esther to [King] Ahasuerus to act and save the Jewish people. We know that Haman said to Ahasuerus, “I will pay you” – that is, I will give you 10,000 talents of silver, which is a massive sum, so that you will agree to my request. Ahasuerus says, “What is your request?” Haman answers, “To annihilate, kill, and destroy all the Jews.” Haman sends letters in which the decree is written from the capital city Shushan to all the provinces, and the matter is immediately known to Mordechai.

To sweeten the judgments

Mordechai immediately begins to act in two ways. The tzaddikim always act in two ways. **One way – in spirituality. Mordechai begins to act through his prayer, sending Eliyahu the prophet to arouse the holy Forefathers, Moshe our teacher, along with all the tzaddikim, to act through prayer.**

The second way – in addition to the above, Mordechai understands that a person needs to make efforts through a natural course. The tzaddikim know that everything is dependent on spirituality, but the Holy One established that a person needs to make efforts in this world according to a natural course. The natural effort that Mordechai does is to send a messenger to Esther to inform her of the decree, and to request of her to go to Ahasuerus to act to cancel the decree. When Esther heard this, she was shocked and said that she doesn’t want to go. Mordechai says to her: if you don’t go, then “you and your father’s house will be destroyed.” Then Esther requests of Mordechai [to tell the Jews], “Fast for me and don’t eat or drink for three days,” because she is going to work great salvations here, and she also is fasting. All of this was on 14 Nissan. On 15 Nissan, the following day, which is Seder night [of Passover], Esther goes to the palace of Ahasuerus.

The palace of Ahasuerus

It’s written in the holy Zohar that the palace of Ahasuerus was called the “House of Graven Images,” because in every corner there were idols and images of idolatry. The palace was entirely full of sorcery. Besides this, in the palace there were seven gates, which were opposite the seven chambers of impurity, and the seventh gate was opposite the absolute depth of impurity.

Our Sages say that when Esther approached the king, Divine Inspiration departed from her because of the immensity of the impurity that was in that place. Esther was after 24 hours of fasting, and all of her strength only came from the light of the Divine Presence which illuminated within her. **When Esther felt that the Divine Inspiration departed from her, then in one moment she fell into a state of terrible constriction, and she began to pray exceedingly and to scream to Hashem: “My G-d, my G-d, why have You abandoned me?!” Why do You abandon me in this place?**

The Holy Ari asks: Why did Esther scream twice, ‘My G-d, My G-d’? He explains that in a place so impure, simple compassion wasn’t enough for Esther. Therefore, she requested that great compassion be revealed and illuminate to her, from the secret of *Keter* (crown) – that only this could help her in a place so impure. And in fact in the [Aramaic] translation of Esther it’s written that at that moment Ahasuerus wanted to kill her, and only in the merit of the great compassion that was revealed to her through her prayer, Ahasuerus had mercy on her, and extended to her the golden scepter and asked her, “What is [in your heart], Queen Esther and what is your request? [Even if it be] until half the kingdom, it shall be granted to you.”

The inner-story of the Book of Esther

Up to here is the story according to its simple meaning, but there is another layer to this entire story. Our Sages reveal to us in the Talmud a key which serves as a great principle in learning the Book of Esther: **In every place where it is written in the Book of Esther “the King” by itself, and it’s not specified as “King Ahasuerus,” you need to expound that the intention is also the Holy One.** The story according to its simple meaning is true. Such actually took place and the *Midrash* (homiletic exegesis) cannot remove it from its simple meaning, but if you want to learn deeper subject matter, secrets and allusions, then wherever it’s written “the King” in the Book of Esther, understand it as referring to the Holy One.

Now we will look at it according to the homiletic meaning. It’s written in the Book of Esther, “And Esther stood in the courtyard of the King opposite the King’s palace” – Esther stands inside the King’s palace, the palace of the Holy One; that is to say, she enters into holiness. “And the King sits on the throne of his kingship” – The Holy One sits on the throne of His Kingship. “And the King extended to Esther the golden scepter” – The Holy One extends to Esther the golden scepter. “And Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.” Now, this is incomprehensible: **According to the simple meaning, Esther invites the King and Haman to the feast. She enters into the interior of the seven chambers of impurity, and yet according to the homiletic interpretation she now finds herself in the highest holiness. How does the simple meaning mesh with the homiletic meaning?**

Rabbi Natan says in Likutey Halachot a very awesome fundamental. Esther really went to the palace of Ahasuerus, but why did she go? What caused her to go? She definitely didn’t choose out of her own will to go, rather the tzaddik sent her – Mordechai sent her. It’s true that the goal is to save the Jewish people;

however, this is a dangerous mission, because he is sending her to an extremely impure place. She just starts to go, and what does she do? Her soul screams out exceedingly to Hashem.

Esther, in body and action, is in the world of *Asiyah* (action). She's situated amongst the highest impurity, but since this is through the mission of the tzaddik (and she, from the viewpoint of her soul, has absolutely no desire to be in this place), she bears it, suffers, and is in pain. Why does she need to reach such places? And in the midst of this pain, she cries out to Hashem. Therefore, now the Holy One is revealed to her on the throne of His Kingship. Specifically now, in this circumstance, Esther finds herself and acts in the holiest place in the world, in the Holy of Holies. Even though in the corporal eyes of the world of *Asiyah*, she finds herself in an awful and dreadful place, **her soul, through the supplication which she prayed, worked the greatest achievement in the world. And what is this achievement? "And the King extended the golden scepter."**

The Golden Scepter

It's written in holy books that the golden scepter is a great secret. The Ba'al HaTanya says that the golden scepter is the channel for the descent of the life-force and influx of the Holy One to the world. It's written in holy books that there is a spiritual place that is called the "tip of the scepter," and that this is an extremely high spiritual level which is called *Gevurot d'Atik* (the severities of the Ancient One). Why? Because the tzaddik that merits to reach this place can sweeten all the judgments and severities from the Jewish people.

The Book of Esther says: "And the King extended the golden scepter, and she touched the tip of the scepter." Through Esther touching the "tip of the scepter," she acts to sweeten severities in the highest place; she acts upon the severities of Atik. From the moment that she touches the tip of the scepter, exactly 24 hours pass and they hang Haman. From the moment that she touches the head of the scepter, then already all the judgments on high are sweetened. It only took another 24 hours until the salvation was revealed also in this world.

There is absolutely no despair in the world

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin explains how this *avodah* (Divine service) is relevant to us. There are two basic processes through which it's possible to reach and act on such a high level. One way is that of the tzaddikim [who have reached] the highest holiness, who have worked on themselves for decades...who not only are meticulous in the essence of their deeds to fulfill Torah and the mitzvot on a very high level of perfection, but that they don't even have so much as a hairbreadth of thought, movement, or word that isn't according to the will of the Holy One. Through this type of *avodah* they merit to act upon *Gevurot d'Atik* and to sweeten the judgments from the Jewish people.

The second way is the way of *ba'aley teshuva* (returnees to Judaism). A person who fell and stumbled because he didn't manage to stand up to the tests of the evil inclination, and now he wants to do *teshuva* (repentance)...sometimes from

the standpoint of Divine conduct, they close for him all the gates – as it were, saying to him, “Hashem doesn’t want to forgive you,” leaving him in darkness and constriction.

The person cries out to Hashem: I want to get close! They say to him: We don’t want [you]. Who wants you anyways? The person gets confused and goes backwards. **After he calms down a little bit, he says: “I don’t have any other place. Where should I go? I know that I don’t have any place to go.” The person goes to sit in some corner and wait. A little time passes. Once more he wakes up and tries to get close, but once again they push him away, and he doesn’t understand what’s going on here.**

Then the tzaddik begins to be revealed to the person. The tzaddik says to him, “Don’t give up.” Then he says, “But what will I do in the meantime?” The tzaddik says to him, “In the meantime, hold on to your good desires. In talking to Hashem, tell the Holy One, ‘I want to serve You,’ and don’t pay attention to this that they’re pushing you away. You do your part, and it doesn’t make any difference what you go through. You’ll go through humiliation. You’ll feel that you’re the worst. Your friend did teshuva and he’s a Rebbe and G-dly kabbalist, while you wander around in the streets, drink coffee, and speak a few words of encouragement with a friend. Don’t pay any attention to anything! This isn’t your business at all. You do your part and tell the Holy One, ‘Even so, I want to get close to You.’”

Rabbi Tzadok says an awesome and deeply profound thing. A person fell into sins, not intentionally, G-d forbid...he has in his soul sins, and his heart is broken from his sins, and he says, “How did I reach these sorts of places? Why did I need to go through all of these filthy places? And now he screams out of pain: “My G-d, my G-d, why have You abandoned me?!” ...these are all the screams, the protests, and the prayers against the evil inclination...this is the secret of *Gevurot d’Atik*.

A person who will be strong and determined on that point and tell the Holy One: “However many times You throw me away, I will never abandon You!...because there’s no other reality. Rabbi Nachman of Breslev said that there is absolutely no despair in the world, so I’m not giving up!” ...through the power of this determination he can act on the highest level which is called “*Gevurot d’Atik*,” to cancel out the *klipah* (evil force) of Amalek and to sweeten the judgments from the Jewish people.

Certainly, from the standpoint of action, from the standpoint of choice, we want to be at the highest level of holiness, to always learn Torah, to pray, to do good deeds. We want to be in the midst of good, but if all of [these conditions] are not fulfilled...during these times, when we merit, in spite of all this, to connect and bind ourselves to the guidance and mindset of Rabbi Nachman—in prayer, in strengthening ourselves, in talking to friends...specifically through these passageways, and our strengthening ourselves, we merit to enact this secret and touch the tip of the scepter. May it be His will that we merit to this.

Concept for Life: The Golden Scepter

The Ba'al HaTanya says that the Golden Scepter is the channel for the life-force and influx of the Holy One to this world. And why does he name it "the Golden Scepter?" There are two main channels of influx: One—*Hasadim* (lovingkindnesses); the second—*Gevurot* (severities). When a person feels the spiritual influx or life-force, it means that *Hasadim* or *Gevurot* are being drawn onto him now. *Gevurot* are a greater influx than are *Hasadim*, and the gold alludes to *Gevurot*. It's written in the holy books that there is a place for these *Gevurot*, a very high spiritual place which is called *Gevurot d'Atik*. The work of all the *tzaddikim* is to merit to reach *Gevurot d'Atik*. Why? Because the *tzaddik* who merits to reach and achieve things there...merits to sweeten all the judgments and severities from the Jewish people. (See **Advice** on page 2)

Advice – To touch the Golden Scepter

Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin writes that there are two basic processes through which it is possible to reach and act on such a high level as this – the tip of the Golden Scepter.

One way is that of the *tzaddikim* [who have reached] the highest holiness, who have worked on themselves for decades...who not only are meticulous in the essence of their deeds to fulfill Torah and the *mitzvot* on a very high level of perfection, **but that they don't even have so much as a hairbreadth of thought, movement, or word that isn't according to the will of the Holy One. Through this type of avodah they merit to act upon *Gevurot d'Atik* and to sweeten the judgments from the Jewish people.**

The second way is the way of *ba'aley teshuva*. A person who fell and stumbled because he didn't manage to stand up to the tests of the evil inclination, and now he wants to do *teshuva*...sometimes from the standpoint of Divine conduct, they close for him all the gates – as it were, saying to him, "Hashem doesn't want to forgive you," leaving him in darkness and constriction.

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Then the *tzaddik* begins to be revealed to the person. The *tzaddik* says to him, "Don't give up. **You do your part and tell the Holy One: 'Even so, I want to get close to You.'**" **Rabbi Tzadok says an awesome and deeply profound thing: this is the secret of *Gevurot d'Atik*.**

A person who will be strong and determined on that point and tell the Holy One: "However many times You throw me away, I will never abandon you!...because

there's no other reality. Rabbi Nachman of Breslev said that there is absolutely no despair in the world, so I'm not giving up!" **Through the power of this determination he can act on the highest level which is called "Gevurot d'Atik," to cancel out the *klipah* of Amalek and to sweeten the judgments from the Jewish people.**

Story

Prayer from the depths of the heart

An incident from the times of our teacher the Ba'al Shem Tov, when there was an accusation demanding annihilation, G-d have mercy, on one of the communities. When the Ba'al Shem Tov saw the gravity of the situation, he intensified his prayers and supplications on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. At the time of the Ne'ilah prayer, his holy pupils recognized in the prayer of the Ba'al Shem Tov that the state of the accuser was extremely grave, and they also exerted themselves in prayer and supplications with tremendous weeping from the depths of the heart. When the people praying in both the men's and women's sections of the synagogue saw that the Ba'al Shem Tov and his pupils were exerting themselves in their prayers, and in their hearing their screams in a bitter voice, screeching with weeping and supplications, their hearts were broken within them, and they also wept in their prayers. When they saw that the time for the evening prayer already arrived and that the Ba'al Shem Tov and his holy pupils were still standing in place, strengthening and exerting themselves in their prayers, everyone understood that the situation was terrible. And the men and women cried from the deepest point in their hearts with tremendous weeping, and there was a great commotion.

And so it was that for the last several years a Hebrew youth—a villager, a cow and sheep herder—would come for the High Holy Days to the synagogue of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and being that he was completely ignorant, he would stand, listen, and look into the face of the prayer leader without saying anything. Like a villager, he knew how to mimic with his voice the sounds of animals—the goats, sheep, birds, and fowl, and the most important of all for him was the sound of the rooster crow. In his seeing the great excitement that was in the synagogue, and upon his hearing the weeping in the men's and women's sections and the terrible screaming, his heart also broke within him, and he called out in a loud voice: "Cock-a-doodle-doo! Our Father in Heaven, have mercy!"

When it was heard in the synagogue a voice calling out like a rooster, the people standing in the men's section were stunned, and those listening in the women's section were terrified, and they didn't know who it was who was calling. As they heard the scream, "Our Father in Heaven, have mercy!", they saw that the villager youth was making his voice heard. A few of the supplicants who were standing next to the villager rebuked him so as to silence him and wanted to drive him out. And he said to them: "I'm also a Jew, and your G-d is also my G-d!" The elderly synagogue attendant Rabbi Yosef Yuzfa calmed the spirits of the supplicants and told the villager that he should stay in his place as before. **After**

a few moments passed, the voice of the Ba'al Shem Tov and after him his holy pupils could be heard hastening to finish the Ne'ilah prayer, and the holy face of the Ba'al Shem Tov was exuding light from joy.

With unique pleasantness the Ba'al Shem Tov began the prayer leader's repetition of the Ne'ilah prayer, and with special arousal said the verses of the unification "Shema Yisrael"..."Baruch Shem Cevod Malchuto"..."Hashem Hu HaElokim" – and he sang songs of joy. When the Ba'al Shem Tov came with his pupils to the meal at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, he began to relate that there was an accusation on one of the congregations of Israel, G-d have mercy, and when he exerted himself in his prayer to arouse heavenly mercy on them, he encountered a great accusation on himself regarding his attempts to settle Jews in villages and crossroads, where they could learn, G-d forbid, from their non-Jewish neighbors.

When they started checking the deeds and situation of the villagers, the Ba'al Shem Tov related, I saw that the situation was very difficult, and I was amidst only evil [judgments]. However, all of a sudden the voice of this simple villager was heard in the heavens: "Cock-a-doodle-do! Our Father in Heaven, have mercy!" – so that this sincere call caused great spiritual satisfaction above, all the way to the highest levels, and canceled out the accusations; and the judgments were canceled from upon the congregation and from upon myself. (Otzar Sippurey Chabad)

From the book Otzar Hayir'a (advice from Likutei Halachot written by Rabbi Natan of Breslov)

Section 74

Mordechai is the aspect of the true tzaddik in every generation; he is the aspect of the head of the household, as is elucidated inside. And those who merited to come close to him and to be included within his house of holiness...they are like the aspect of those who were surrounded in the desert by the clouds of glory, over whom Amalek had no power. Only those whom the cloud spit out, those who were outside the camp, outside of the house of holiness...**over these people...Haman-Amalek overwhelms and wants to conquer them under his rule, without letting them return to Hashem, to return to the camp of holiness**, because Amalek is the aspect of the "Rosh kol hutzot (head of all open areas)." However, the true tzaddik in every generation always fights the war against Amalek, in order to save the holy stones [souls] which are spilled out and reincarnated in "rosh kol hutzot," to bring them out from under the authority of Amalek and to bring them into the house of holiness. However, Amalek who is the aspect of the Accuser, mixes up the world a great deal through controversy and accusation, until it's impossible to know in any way whatsoever where is the truth, because the falsehood makes itself look similar to the truth in all its aspects. And this principle is the aspect of the birth-pangs of Mashiach, **and the rectification of this is only sincerity and simplicity...that whoever wants to**

have mercy on his soul that it shouldn't lose all hope, G-d forbid...he needs to behave with sincerity and in truth, and to shout out to Hashem a great deal that He should guide him to the absolute truth so that he should know who to cling to, in a way that he should merit to return to the Blessed One in truth.

Therefore, he needs to rise at *hatzot* (halachic midnight) and examine his deeds and mourn over the destruction of his soul, and over the fact that he caused the destruction of the Holy Temple, or that he prevents its rebuilding, G-d forbid...to scream a great deal to Hashem as it is fitting for him to scream over his soul – according to what each person knows in his soul...then he will certainly merit to know the absolute truth, because a person who desires the truth is sent an angel of truth. This is the aspect of, “And Mordechai knew all that had been done,” because he knew well exactly how the world gets mixed up in every generation through the klipah of Haman-Amalek until it's impossible to know where is the truth. Then “Mordechai tore his clothes...and cried a loud and bitter cry” ...and so all Israel did as well. And through this, they merited to cause the downfall of Haman-Amalek, and the holiness of the true tzaddik who is an aspect of Mordechai was revealed.

1. Through *hitbodedut* (secluded prayer) salvation comes.
2. A person who finds merit in the Jewish people arouses salvation, and the salvation comes about through him.
3. A person who makes the path of Hashem known to the masses...through this, even when he is between gentiles, the Holy One saves him.
4. By you taking advice from the Rabbi, you merit to salvation.
5. It's difficult for a person to find any salvation when there is a tzaddik in town and he doesn't request for him to pray for him.

The Light of the Tzaddik

The secret of Esther – the crying out, this is the secret of being bound to the true tzaddik. Because **in truth, from where did Esther receive the strength to fight the temptations, to continue to cry out to Hashem, to believe that the Holy One would take her out of the palace of Ahasuerus? Indeed, this isn't a situation that lasted for a day or a month. Five years, day after day, she faced the overpowering of the greatest powers of impurity in the world.** How can a person not be stained by this and not give up hope? From the power of the tzaddik. Mordechai, who Esther was bound to, is the tzaddik who is bound to the highest worlds even during the time that he is here [in this world]...he surrounds and envelops her everyday to see how she is doing. These letters of light which are called in the kabbalah “*Or Mah*,” are a very high light that is the aspect of *Keter* (crown), which draws life-force and faith into the concealment.

From the book “Ma'amakim”

A Simple Jew

The Ba'al Shem Tov said: In the place that a person thinks of – there he is found. And Rabbi Nachman added: Where the heart desires and longs for – there you are. Even if you are actually [physically] below, but your thoughts and desires long and desire to be on high – in truth, you are on high.

From the book "Har HaMor"