

Parshas Tetzaveh ♦ Rabbi Eliezer Kessler

In honor of Purim Katan we present a special edition of the weekly dvar torah!

The custom of dressing up in costumes and masquerading on Purim is very old. One might think that it's just one of the things we do to ensure that the kids have a good time on the holiday. However, as we know from previous discussions, even the most basic of our customs usually have multiple layers of meaning associated with them. This one is certainly no different. In fact, because it's Purim we're talking about – the holiday whose whole theme and essence relates to hidden elements at work behind the scenes – it comes as no surprise that the deeper relevance of this custom is somewhat hidden beneath the surface as well.

The first reference we have to the custom of wearing costumes on Purim is in the Shulchan Aruch. It's brought down in the name of Rabbi Yehudah ben Eliezer HaLevi of Mintz (1408-1508) known as the Mahari Mintz. Although the practice is noted there, the Shulchan Aruch doesn't discuss the reasons behind it. For that we have to look to the Gemara.

The Gemara tell us that Esther, and therefore, the entire story of Purim, is hinted at in the Torah by the words, "V'Anochi haster astir panai", which translate as "I will surely hide My face." The Gemara notes that the words haster and astir are very similar to the Hebrew word Esther. The connection is further strengthened by the context within which the pasuk appears. Hashem is telling Moshe that in the future Bnei Yisrael will anger Him by worshipping foreign gods. As a consequence, He will then hide His face, so to speak, so that it will appear as though He had abandoned them.

The mefarshim on this pasuk make it clear that although it will appear to Bnei Yisrael that Hashem had abandoned them in their hour of need, the reality will be quite the opposite. Hashem, like the loving Father that He is, will never truly abandon His children. He merely conceals His presence from us as a way of inducing us to do teshuva – which is exactly what we see in the Purim story. It's this idea that we are reminded of when we don our own costumes and masks as we celebrate.

The Gemara offers another reason for this custom. It relates a conversation between Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his

death, only pretending to seek their extermination. Our masquerading in costumes and masks changes our outward appearance and reminds us of this.

A third reason has to do with the story of Purim itself. We find many disguises and changes of clothes in the Megillah. There are numerous examples. Esther disguised the fact that she was Jewish by not telling anyone of her people and her family. When Mordechai heard the news of the decree against the Jewish people he tore his clothing and put on sackcloth. Haman told the king that "the man the king desires to honor" should be dressed in royal robes. Ha-

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students. The students asked, what was the reason that the entire generation of Mordechai was sentenced to death? Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai answered that it wasn't because they ate and drank at Achashverosh's banquet, for if it was, then only the Jews of Shushan would have been sentenced to death, not all the Jews. Rather, it was because of an earlier sin – the bowing to the idol in the days of Nevuchadnezzar. The students then asked that if this was so, that they were truly worthy of death, then why did Hashem change the decree and spare them?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai answered that the Jews only bowed for appearance sake, so as to avoid the king's wrath, and that they only pretended to worship the idol. Therefore, Hashem too, only acted, midah k'neged midah, for outward appearance in having them sentenced to

man had to dress Mordechai and parade him through the city. Haman's face was covered when Achashverosh ordered that he be hung. And finally, our rabbis tell us that Eliyahu Hanavi disguised himself as Charvona and said to King Achashverosh when he became enraged at Haman, that Haman had built gallows upon which to hang Mordechai.

So we see that even something as simple as dressing up for Purim is infused with much depth and meaning. Of course, none of the above should get in the way of our fully enjoying ourselves on this yom tov. On the contrary, hopefully it will only enhance our enjoyment of this and all future Purim celebrations. May we all have a Purim Katan Sameach! *Good Shabbos!* ♦

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