



## Vayikra; Zachor; Purim 2024

### The Heart of Worship

3 minute read | Straightforward

Prayer is a central aspect of Judaism, if not all religious beliefs. It is an invocation or act that deliberately seeks out and interfaces with the divine.

Although prayer does appear obliquely or sporadically in the Torah, it is not the predominant mode of worship in the Torah or the ancient world the Torah appeared in, an era where animal sacrifice was a near cultural universal. Our sages went out of their way to teach that prayer doesn't just appear in the Torah; prayer stands in as a direct replacement or substitute for the lapsed sacrifices of long ago.

Our prayers are replete with requests to restore Jerusalem and rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. However, authorities are divided on whether the future we yearn for heralds a restoration or replacement of animal sacrifice. While that remains speculative until we find out, it is probably fair to say that it is hard for people in the modern world to wrap their heads around animal sacrifice.

Today's near cultural universal is that animal sacrifice is alien and weird, perhaps even disgusting and nasty. Most people don't want to watch an animal get slaughtered; any arcane mysticism is hard to imagine over the blood and gore.

That leaves prayer in a bit of a void; prayer is a stand-in or substitute for animal sacrifice, and yet an animal sacrifice is hard to relate to in almost every conceivable way, so far removed as it is from our primary experience. Moreover, the Torah has long sections devoted to the different categories and kinds of sacrifice and their details and nuances; sacrifice is clearly the primary mode of worship in the Torah's conception, so prayer seems second-rate.

Either way, prayer is hard to understand. If prayer and sacrifice aren't connected, why bother with something the Torah doesn't validate as having much significance? And if prayer is connected to sacrifice, what element of sacrifice do we even relate to?

The Torah opens the section on sacrifices by outlining a scenario where someone wants to bring an offering:

אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִמֶּם קֹרְבָן לַיהוָה – When one of you presents an offering for God... (1:2)

Although not readily obvious in translation, the Torah utilizes highly unusual language here. Rather than present the sensible scenario where one of you wants to bring an offering, it literally translates to



when someone offers an offering of you, which is to say, literally of yourselves – אָדָם מִמֶּנּוּ / אָדָם / אָדָם  
בְּיִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ.

The Baal HaTanya notes that this reading suggests that at the earliest juncture, the Torah already indicates that as much it's going to talk about animal offerings, it's not about the animal at all; it's about the part of yourself you're willing to offer, and prayer would operate in much the same way – בְּיִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ.

R' Jonathan Sacks teaches that the conventional notion of sacrifice isn't really reflected in the Hebrew term – קָרְבָן. We think of sacrifice as giving something up when the Hebrew word actually means something more like drawing closer – קָרַב. You interact with the divine not with what you give up but by drawing close with what you have; in offering the material to God, you transform the material into the sacred.

God doesn't need our stuff and can't receive it in any tangible way; the Malbim teaches that all a person can ever offer is themselves, which mirrors precisely what the Torah calls for here – בְּיִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ. The Sfas Emes explains that the notion articulated here is that sacrifice and prayer are about aligning ourselves and resources to God's broader plan; prayer isn't secondary to sacrifice; it is the same.

While the form of seeking out the divine may have changed over time depending on the zeitgeist, the substance has remained constant. At the root of all mysticism is a desire to connect with the divine transcendence, and our sages have long identified the inner world of the heart as the battlefield of spirituality – עבודת שבלב. So we can read the Yom Kippur atonement ritual that seems odd to modern sensibilities, yet it maintains relevance to our prayers because the substance transcends the form of the performative aspect; that God forgives humans who want to make amends, goats and string or not.

It's not the form of how it appears so much as it's about the substance of how it is – אחד המרבה ואחד ואחד – הממעט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים.

As Moshe said to his audience, our Creator is always close, quite different from other gods they might have heard of who can only be invoked with specific rituals – כִּי מִי־גוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֱלֹהִים קְרִיבִים אֵלָיו כֹּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ – בְּכִל־קְרָאָנוּ אֵלָיו.

The Izhbitzer suggests that our subconscious hearts and minds hope and pray all the time. When you whisper “Please, God,” hope for the best, or wish that things turn out okay, those unspoken but very real thoughts are prayers that bring tangible wisps of warmth into the world that affirm and sustain, from which things can and will eventually grow – קָרוֹב ה' לְכָל קְרָאָיו לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאָהוּ בְּאֵמֶת.

As the Kotzker said, where can we find God? Wherever we let Him in.

Sacrifice, like prayer, was always about the inner world of the spirit, about opening your heart and yourself to the universe.

And prayer, like sacrifice, can't change God; but it can change you.

---

## **Come As You Are**

3 minute read | Straightforward

We often think of holiness or sanctity as the hallowed privilege of a rare few, the people who have made it, the inner circle of those who are better and wiser than us. They are the ones who can pray for us, guide us, and bring healing. Sometimes that's true; other times, that view is propounded by self-righteous, holier-than-thou folks who self-serve by making us feel that way.

That being said, it is an objective and measurable fact that some people are further on their religious journey and are more advanced on the observance spectrum.

Make no mistake that everyone has the same obligation to meet the standard of perfect observance of the Torah – so, for example, the Torah unambiguously says to keep Shabbos with no exceptions.

Yet, in the external world where theory meets practice, achieving perfection is neither possible nor actual; that standard has only ever been theoretical. We ought to know better than to hold every human to the same standard.

The only uniform standard everyone is mandated to uphold is the half-shekel donation to the Mishkan, the tiniest sum of money, a de minimis threshold contribution. This contribution went towards the foundation sockets, which compare to our threshold foundation of faith and membership of the Jewish People.

But beyond that basic common and tiny denominator, everyone is radically different. Everyone is born in a particular environment, makes mistakes, and is only capable of so much or going so far. We know this intuitively – it is clear that, like all things in life, there must be a subjective element to religiosity by necessity, and there is.

In as much as sacrifices and the Beis HaMikdash are the domain of the privileged few, every single human may bring an offering. One form explicitly recognizes human subjectivity and meets us where we are, contingent on a person's means – קרבן עולה ויורד. While a wealthy person would bring expensive cattle, a working person would be expected to offer a pair of affordable birds, and a person in poverty would only have to provide some cheap flour:



## TorahRedux

ואם־לא תשיג ידו לשתי תורים או לשני בני־יונה והביא את־קרבנו אשר חטא עשירת האפה סלת – And if one’s means do not suffice for two turtledoves or two pigeons, that person shall bring as an offering for that of which one is guilty a tenth of an ephah of choice flour... (5:11)

Whatever the form, the result is a “pleasant scent,” which is how the Torah describes God receiving them warmly – ריח נוח לה. This is quite obviously a metaphor; burning feathers smell disgusting. And yet unmistakably, the same reception reveals that whatever the form, they are substantively the same, whether bull, bird, or flour; all are warmly embraced, with no distinction between rich and poor – נאמר בעוף ריח נוח ונאמר בבהמה ריח נוח, לומר לך אחד המרבה ואחד הממעט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים.

The Chafetz Chaim notes that the principle holds even while the sacrifices have lapsed. If you have the means to help others and do less than you could, you need to step up and meet your duty. To whom much is given, much is expected, and with great power comes great responsibility.

The legendary Reb Zusha of Hanipol would say that when he’d get to Heaven, he wouldn’t be afraid to answer why he wasn’t like Avraham, because he wasn’t Avraham, nor why he wasn’t like Moshe, because he wasn’t Moshe. But when they would ask why he wasn’t like Zusha, he’d have no answer for failing to live up to his unique potential.

As much as we all need to be better, you can only move forward from where you are. You are in the right place to do what you need to – המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו אדמת־קדש הוא –

This idea is at the heart of Korach’s folly, which leads only to ruin and misery. Everyone’s service is different and yet equally welcome.

One of the most powerful phrases in the Torah is when God saw the young Yishmael dying in the desert. The Midrash imagines the angels arguing against divine intervention to save Yishmael because of the atrocities his descendants would commit, but they lose the argument because God evaluates things differently. God answers the boy based on where he is and the facts and circumstances as they are here and now – באשר הוא שם –

In your present condition and natural state, you have a key stake in Judaism and a contribution to make that matters, even before the changes you must still undergo.

You are where you’re supposed to be right now, and you are enough.

## **Stick Together**

3 minute read | Straightforward

TorahRedux | Ancient Words, Timeless Wisdom

Subscriptions and feedback: [Neli@TorahRedux.com](mailto:Neli@TorahRedux.com)



Purim is a fun time all around; apart from reading the Megila and having a party, the two central mitzvos are to give people gifts and distribute charity freely.

Our sages teach that the presence of exile and antisemitism in the world can be understood as a microcosm of the state of the Jewish People, a manifestation of spiritual fragmentation within the Jewish community itself. If we live in a time where Jews are threatened or driven from Israel with division and war, we can be sure division and war exists among ourselves. This perspective suggests that antisemitism acts like an immune response to disharmony and divisions within the Jewish People, reflecting a broader spiritual and ethical imbalance in the world.

The Sfas Emes observes that the holiday of Purim celebrates the backfiring of Haman's plan in particular and evil in general; these practices reenact something Haman tried and failed to exploit – ונהפוך הוא. In the Megila's narrative, Haman highlights the Jewish People's fragmentation:

עַם יְשׁוּבוֹ עִם אֶחָד מְפֹזָר וּמְפֹרָד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכָל מְדִינוֹת מְלְכוּתְךָ וְדַתִּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכָּל עַם – There is one nation, scattered and dispersed among all the regions of your kingdom, and they are different from everyone else. (3:8)

They had lost their way, going so far as to attend the king's party celebrating their downfall, featuring plundered artifacts of the sacked Beis Hamikdash; his plot was able to take hold because they were divided and therefore vulnerable – מְפֹזָר וּמְפֹרָד.

The turning point in the story comes when Esther instructs Mordechai to gather everyone to stand together and fast and pray:

כְּנוּס אֶת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן וְצִוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֵל תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֵל תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשַׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם Shushan. Fast for me; don't eat or drink for three days and nights. (4:16)

A little later, when the fated day comes that the Jewish People face off against a murderous horse, they stand together once again, which the Megila records in the singular, not the plural – וְעָמַד עַל נַפְשָׁם / וְעָמַד.

Division is poison for the Jewish People; sticking together is the key to redemption. Our sages famously note how the Torah describes how the Jewish People camped at Sinai in the singular, not the plural, like one man with one heart - ויהונו / ויהוה. Mirroring this, it follows that our sages teach that standing together on Purim resulted in a second revelation of sorts as well - ויהוה / ויהוה.

As R' Shlomo Farhi explains, unity is not an ideology but a grassroots and organic practice. We pray for grace every day; Esther is described as graceful and charming, and there was something about her that was captivating, a twinkle in her eye that captured hearts and minds – הָן. Grace is cognate to the word used for camping at Sinai, which our sages take to mean that Jewish People loved each other and found grace in each other eyes – ויהוה / ויהוה.



Sharing hopes and dreams, people's hearts can beat together, and we can truly love one another. Without closing my eyes to your flaws and knowing my imperfections, I can recognize that there is something wonderful about you. If I can see your quality and you can see mine, we will have peace; if I recognize and see my own, I will know peace.

As R' Moshe Bane notes, Purim is a time of unity and is the only holiday celebrated at different times by different Jews, based on urban geography; unity doesn't mean homogenous conformity.

In what Hillel and Rabbi Akiva classified as the Golden Rule, love your neighbour as yourself, the Baal Shem Tov taught that we must accept others and their flaws as surely as we accept our own. As Baal HaTanya notes, we are not commanded to love humanity in the abstract but individuals in particular—the fallible, flesh-and-blood person nearby who gets on your nerves.

The mitzvos of Purim are practical acts of kindness and good deeds that bring people together. They aren't sacred rituals with arcane intentions and abstract symbols. Give your neighbors some cakes and a drink, and give some poor people a helping hand.

People are different, and that's ok. We have to stick together; the natural consequence of sticking together is holiness and redemption.

But as the mitzvos of Purim show, talk is cheap.

Sticking together requires action.

---

## **Unmasking Power**

3 minute read | Intermediate

The Purim story revolves around a mighty empire that extends across the known world in the royal court of a king who is ostensibly the embodiment of power and authority. It presents a fascinating commentary on the nature of power and where we think it lies.

In the story, this mighty empire uses its reach to send and recall conflicting and contradictory messages, and the great king cannot make his own decisions; he relies heavily on the counsel of others and never makes a decision on his own.

The story opens with the king's grandeur and luxury, with his lavish parties and extravagant display of wealth serving as a testament to his power and greatness in the eyes of his subjects. Machiavelli



suggests that perceptions of a ruler's greatness can significantly influence their hold on power, as people are more swayed by what they see than by the ruler's intrinsic qualities or moral standing.

Power has two components: a physical and enforceable element and a subjective belief, and beliefs are much stronger. When everyone believes something, it can be as real as hitting a wall. Correspondingly, physical enforcement of power may be weak or non-existent, but no one knows until cracks in the wall of belief appear, and the illusion quickly disappears.

Consensus reality and accepted truths are ironic; you can be tangibly right about something in the real world, but until subjective belief comes around, it doesn't matter. You might as well be wrong. This applies to so much in human society, including negative and positive perceptions, cultural norms, the stock market, leadership, brand recognition, credibility, and accepted truth.

Power resides where men believe it resides. It's a trick, a shadow on the wall.

The king's insecurity is revealed to all when Queen Vashti refuses to appear before his guests, and he executes her. While seemingly assertive, this act is transparently a desperate attempt by Achashverosh to save face and reassert his power, a power that is continually undermined by his own ineffectiveness.

His entire rule was characterized by rashness and indecision, like hastily executing his first wife but flip-flopping on the state genocide policy. Instilling fear among people in this way led to instability and unpredictability, undermining his authority and failing to secure loyalty or respect in a meaningful way, as is borne out in the rest of the story.

Throughout the story, the king is portrayed as spineless, underscoring the illusory nature of his power, which, though vast, is hollow at its core. This kind of power is illusory, a paper tiger, something that appears threatening but is, in reality, ineffectual and unable to withstand challenge; the king was incredibly powerful politically yet fundamentally weak.

In stark contrast to the power of the Persian empire, Mordechai is completely powerless, and yet he is by far the strongest character in the story, upright and unshakeable. He bravely stands alone, helping others find their courage, first Esther and then his people.

Initially seen as a minor figure, Mordechai derives strength from his moral conviction and unwavering faith. His refusal to bow to Haman challenged the empire's power structure; his seemingly small act began to crack the wall of subjective belief that upheld the existing order. Esther's journey also sees her evolve from a passive queen to a proactive savior, finding belief in her own power to the point of becoming the catalyst for redemption and helping her people find the power to fight for survival.

The Purim story challenges conventional notions of power, presenting a world where the seemingly strong are weak, and the ostensibly weak possess true strength. Victory does not go to the mighty empire but to the brave people united by courage and moral conviction, inspired by Mordechai and Esther.

The empire, with its grandeur and vastness, is a facade masking the emptiness of his leadership. In contrast, the real power lies in the moral integrity and bravery of individuals like Mordechai and Esther.

The Purim story is a timeless and relevant reminder that in our value system, respect will not be found in the flashy and superficial displays of grandeur and wealth or the empty and meaningless flexes of power and politics.

Respectable authority and capability are not found in titles or thrones but in our character, integrity, and ability to help and inspire others.

---

## **One Is Plenty**

3 minute read | Straightforward

Our culture is saturated with messaging about efficiency, instant feedback in real-time, and rapid scale and success. But as Steve Jobs said, overnight success stories take a really long time.

What appears sudden to others is the product of many invisible moments and a sustained commitment to pursuing goals and ideals. People who have experienced success will usually admit it was the culmination of a long journey of unseen hard work and dedication filled mostly with countless setbacks and perhaps the occasional win.

The Book of Esther starts slowly, with a lengthy prologue before it gets going, and even when it does get into the main story, the main story goes slowly, too. Before Haman rose to power, the story tells us the kind of person Mordechai was and what he was about – someone who showed up for Esther day after day:

וּבְכָל־יּוֹם וַיֵּשֶׁב מֵרְדֵּכָי מִתְּהִלָּה לְפָנֵי הַצַּר בֵּית־הַנְּשִׂימִים לְדַעַת אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אִסְתֵּר וּמַה־יַּעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ – And every single day, Mordechai would walk about in front of the women’s quarters, to know how Esther was doing and what was happening with her. (2:11)

After Haman’s rise but before his plot begins, Mordechai was still there every day, only now dealing with daily resistance, defending his refusal to bow to Haman:





וְכָל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כָּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהֶמֶן כִּי־כֵן צִוָּה־לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וּמִרְדֵּכָי לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה ... וַיְהִי כַּאֲמָרָם אֵלָיו יוֹם יוֹם – All the king’s courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king’s order concerning him; but Mordechai would not kneel or bow low... When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordechai’s resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew. (3:2,4)

The Sfas Emes highlights how only someone with the dedication and sensitivity to care day in and day out, who recognizes the value in showing up every day, will have the staying power to withstand the formidable challenge of swimming against a powerful current, resisting prevailing norms to face off with one of the most powerful villains in Jewish history.

But for the person with that kind of determination and perseverance, this story offers not just a recital of history but an assurance for the future that this sort of person will not bow – לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה. We all choose whether to bow to the forces of Haman in our lives or whether to go with the flow, getting dragged along through passive inertia.

The Sfas Emes notes that this promise is directed at us, the readers of the future, an assurance that in all times and places, there will always be a person who refuses to bow. When the story introduces us to Mordechai, the protagonist, it doesn’t even say his name, giving him a generic title, a Jewish man – אִישׁ יְהוּדִי. The unnamed Jewish hero can be anyone; in that time and place, his name was Mordechai.

Our sages suggest an alternate reading, not that there was a Jewish man, but that there was a single man, one person who could stand alone in the face of adversity – יְהוּדִי / יְחִידִי.

One isn’t much, but in truth, one can be enough. One spark can burst into flame. One compliment can build newfound confidence. One date can turn into a lifelong relationship.

One person’s commitment to their ideals and courage to stand up for their beliefs can inspire others to stand with them. One person’s kindness or generosity can generate a ripple effect that influences everything else. One person can change the course of history and leave a lasting impact on the world.

Your choices and actions can extend far beyond yourself and deep into the lives of countless others and catalyze powerful transformation; even minor actions can produce significant results. One idea or action can make a difference.

As the story and this teaching remind us, Mordechai might have been the only one, but one person is all it takes.

One person is enough.



## Amalek Redux

4 minute read | Straightforward

The Torah has lots of laws. Some are fun and easy to understand, like Shabbos, and some are fun and challenging to understand, like shaking the Lulav. A rare few are difficult to understand and might also leave us with a sense of moral unease.

One of them is the laws concerning Amalek.

On the back of the miraculous Exodus and escape at the Red Sea, the Jewish People were exhausted and weary when a band of raiders called Amalek attacked the stragglers in the group.

Seeing as the Jewish People are the protagonists and our ancestors, we understand that Amalek is the antagonist. But of all the adversaries of Jewish history, Amalek has a unique distinction, sitting in a class of its own. From the earliest Jewish writings, Amalek is the code word for everything that is wrong with the world ideologically.

The story of the Land of Israel is a story of conquest. In many stories, the inhabitants recognize the geopolitical risk and act accordingly, such as Balak, Sichon, and Og. But that's not how the Torah tells the story of Amalek, who attack not out of self-defense, but because they could, and with great dishonor, by targeting weak stragglers.

By most counts, there are no less than three separate duties incumbent on all Jews as it pertains to Amalek: to remember that Amalek attacked the Jewish People just as they left Egypt; not to forget what they did; and the big one, to eradicate the memory of Amalek from the world.

These laws are serious and are part of the rare category of mitzvos that apply to all people at all times under all circumstances.

But isn't it a little unsettling?

It sounds uncomfortably like a mitzvah to commit genocide, the moral argument against which is certainly compelling, especially for a nation who heard the commandment "do not kill" from God's voice at Sinai, even more so having suffered a genocide in living memory. Although some people have no trouble understanding it that way, you're in good company if you find difficulty in a commandment to kill Amalek today.

Long ago, the Gemara dismissed the notion of practicing the straightforward interpretation, pointing to a story in the Prophets where the Assyrian king Sennacherib forcibly displaced and resettled the entire Middle East, eliminating distinct bloodlines of racial descent.

While this elegantly eliminates the problem in a practical sense – there is no problem because the law can no longer apply – the moral issue remains open.

Over centuries, a substantial number of prominent halachic authorities have clarified that the status of Amalek is not racial; that although a tribe called Amalek attacked the Jewish People and formed the context for the law, the law is not and never was an instruction to commit genocide against those people. While the Gemara says that Amalek can never join the Jewish People, it also says that descendants of Amalek taught Torah in Israel, suggesting that their women, or children of women who married out, could lose their identity as Amalek. If Amalek isn't a race, there is no law to kill such a particular group, and there is no moral dilemma.

R' Chaim Brisker explains that Amalek is not a particular group of humans; it is a conceptual category. It's an attitude and ideology that transcends any specific race or individual and persists forever, an archetype of evil that we must fundamentally stand against and be on alert for. Writers through the ages have labeled enemies or opposition as Amalek, which, although often lazy, correctly categorizes and formalizes this eternal struggle.

The perpetrators of the original crime are all dead, and modern society does not believe in the heritability of guilt. But the offense isn't simply that they physically attacked the Jewish People; as Rashi explains, it's that they cooled us off along the way while we were weary – אֲשֶׁר קָרָה בְּדַרְוֹה וַיִּזְנַב בָּהּ כִּי כָל־הַנְּשָׁאִים אֲחֵרֵיהּ וְאִתָּהּ עָנָה וַיִּגַע.

As the Netziv points out, it would be self-defeating and tautological to have an eternal command to destroy something's memory; the Torah makes that impossible simply by mentioning it.

The Kedushas Levi goes further and suggests that Amalek's legacy lies in the heart of every person.

We might stop to wonder if the ideology of Amalek is all around us in the social Darwinist culture we have built ourselves, which is, at its core, a simple application of survival of the fittest behavior.

Sure, the malignant form of Amalek looks like a Haman or a Hitler. But the benign form is all around us, in ourselves and others. It's not any particular humans we need to overcome, but their attitude and ideology. The fight against Amalek does not end even though the nation is long gone; its legacy remains, and it's the legacy that poses a threat.

A Chassidic aphorism observes that Amalek is numerically equivalent to doubt – עמלק / ספק.

In our day-to-day lives, that looks like when you consider doing something bold or different, and someone, perhaps even yourself, pokes holes or second-guesses the new initiative. “I want to try this new idea, but maybe I shouldn't? What if it's the wrong choice? Maybe I don't deserve it?” Or perhaps, “Why start or support that project—aren't there far more important ones?”



The attack in Rephidim only happens opportunistically when people are caught off guard – / רפידים / רפיון ידיים.

Anthropologists and psychologists have long observed the phenomenon of crab mentality in some groups. The metaphor derives from a pattern of behavior noted in crabs when trapped in a bucket – any individual crab could easily escape, but the others will undermine its efforts, ensuring the group's collective demise. In some groups, members will attempt to reduce the self-confidence of any member who achieves success beyond the others, whether out of envy, resentment, spite, or competitive feeling, to halt their progress. The wrong circles have powerful inertia that draws members towards conformity and mediocrity in a self-fulfilling negative feedback loop.

Letting feelings of self-doubt and personal incompetence persist is called impostor syndrome. You can baselessly hold back from doing things that could transform your life because you're not ready to face the reality of your own potential greatness.

As the Mishna in Pirkei Avos says, eliminate doubt – הסתלק מן הספק.

If it sounds pithy or trite, just know that that's quite literally Amalek's great crime – trying to hold the Jewish People back just as they were beginning to break through, discouraging them just as they were getting started and finding their feet – אֲשֶׁר קָרָה בְּדַרְדָּרָה וַיִּזְנוּב בָּהּ כֹּל־הַנְּחָשִׁים אֲחֵרֵיהֶּ וְאַתָּה עֲיַר וַיִּגַע –

It's not apologetics or mental gymnastics; it neatly fits the words and is something we recognize all around us.

Haters rarely hate you; far more often, they hate themselves because you're showing them a reflection of what they wish they could be, and they don't like feeling inadequate.

Shine bright and soar, and forget about the people who tried to hold you back.

---

## **Never Enough**

4 minute read | Straightforward

Most humans born in the past several thousand years have heard of Moshe; he is rightly one of the most recognized figures in human history.

Today, we might reasonably say that a strange burning bush is no basis for a system of government and that supreme executive power ought to derive from a mandate from the masses – although that's



not the worldview of the Torah's story. But to the extent there's some truth to that, we might expect Moshe's glittering array of accomplishments would eventually win some popular support.

He stood up to Pharaoh and the Egyptian empire and won. He walked a generation of enslaved people into freedom, led them through a suddenly dry ocean, gathered them at Sinai, generating magic food and water along the barren desert waste, among other significant and unparalleled achievements.

And still, the people complained at every turn, resisting him every step of the way.

One particular time, the infamous Korach raised a formidable following and led an attempted coup and insurrection to supplant and usurp his cousin Moshe:

וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב־לָכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה בָּלִים קִדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קְהַל ה' – They combined against Moshe and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! All the community are holy, all of them! God is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above God’s congregation?” (16:3)

Korach directly paraphrases God’s directive at Sinai to be a nation of holy people – וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מְקַלְחִים כָּל־יְמֵי חַיְוֵיכֶם / כָּל־הָעֵדָה בָּלִים קִדְשִׁים.

This was a grave challenge and threat to Moshe; as one famous quote put it, when you come at the king, you best not miss. Moshe fully understood the severity of the threat and responded rhetorically:

הַמַּעֲט מִכֶּם כִּי־הִבְדִּיל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתְכֶם מֵעַדְת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַקְרִיב אֶתְכֶם אֵלָיו לַעֲבֹד אֶת־עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁכַּן ה' וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְשָׂרְתָם: וַיִּקְרַב אֶתְּךָ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו בְּגִי־לְוִי אֶתְּךָ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו בְּגִי־לְוִי אֶתְּךָ וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם גַּם־כֹּהֲנֵי: – “Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you direct access, to perform the duties of God’s Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them? Now that God has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you, do you seek the priesthood too?!” (16:9,10)

But Moshe’s rhetoric appears to fall quite flat. There is no challenge or rebuttal to what Korach has claimed, no counter, checkmate, or riposte. It is only a restatement!

So when Moshe accuses him of wanting to be part of the priesthood – וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם גַּם־כֹּהֲנֵי – it’s hard to see how that would give Korach a moment’s pause. Korach would simply say yes, precisely!

Where is Moshe’s winning argument?

The Shem Mi’Shmuel explains that Moshe’s accusation towards Korach was about how self-serving his coup was. Moshe’s rhetoric pierces through Korach’s claim of shared holiness; because, true as it might be, Korach’s words are empty and self-serving. God wants people dedicated to God’s purposes; Korach was out for himself – for power and influence, personal gain, and honor – וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם / תִּהְיוּ־לִי.



Moshe's entire story prominently features the enormous personal cost and self-sacrifice required to lead and serve his people faithfully. Ahron's entire story was about connecting people with the divine and closer to each other. Korach's accusation of overstepping – רב־לָקַם – rings hollow; Moshe's accusation of Korach self-serving rings true – בַּקְשָׁתָם.

But perhaps there's more to Moshe's retort.

Our sages associate Korach with another famous villain – Haman.

Both were fabulously wealthy; our sages say they were two of the richest men in the world.

Both were highly influential; Haman was second only to the king, and Korach was in the highest tier as well. While Moshe and Ahron had the most visible roles, Korach and the whole family of Levi had critical and desirable roles in the new Jewish religion – הַבְּדִיל אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַקְרִיב אֶתְכֶם אֵלָיו – לַעֲבֹד אֶת־עֲבֹדַת מִשְׁכַּן הַ וְלַעֲמֹד לְפָנַי הַעֲדָה לְשִׁרְתָּם.

But with all Haman's influence, prestige, power, and wealth, it wasn't worthwhile to him without one thing:

– וְכִלְיָהוּ אֵינָנּוּ שׁוּנָה לִי בְכָל־עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֶנִּי רֹאֶה אֶת־מִרְדֵּכַי הַיְהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמְּלָכָה: “Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see that Jew Mordechai sitting in the palace gate!”

Perhaps the rhetoric in Moshe's reply to Korach is similar – הֲמַעֲט מִכֶּם – is everything Korach already has so trivial? Are all the duties, honors, and privileges of the Mishkan still not enough?

Korach craves the one thing out of reach, the priesthood, without which everything counts for naught. Haman desires the one thing out of reach, Mordechai's submission, without which everything counts for naught. Not only do they take their blessings for granted, they outright trivialize, discount, and devalue everything they have – הֲמַעֲט מִכֶּם.

What's more, our sages note that the Torah refers to Haman in the story of Adam and Eve, hinted in God's language to Adam asking if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge, which can be read as an oblique allusion to Haman – הַמֶּן / הַמִּזְהָרֵעַ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לִבְלֹתִי אֶכְלֵמִמְנוּ אֶכְלֵתָ –

Dayan Chanoch Ehrentrau observes that Adam and Eve's mistake is the same color. God creates the entire universe for them; all of Creation is at their disposal in the palm of their hand. But they crave the one thing out of reach, one tree they can't eat from, without which everything falls stale and flat.

It's the same mistake as Korach and Haman, a consistent and recurring mistake humans make from the beginning.



While there is plenty of room for healthy ambition and aspirations for tomorrow, you must still value and appreciate where you stand today; otherwise, what's it all worth? While you can say you appreciate your blessings, your actions may indicate otherwise.

Gratitude and its inverse form, taking things for granted, are recursive throughout the Torah, consistently one of its core themes and a leading indicator of prosperity or disaster. Korach, Haman, and Adam and Eve all suffered severe punishment for taking their blessings for granted – they lost everything, and everything quickly turned to nothing.

They say you don't know what you've got until it's gone, but sometimes you do know what you have; you just never think you'll lose it while you chase the next thing.

Appreciate what you have, and who loves and cares for you. Don't take the people or things in your life for granted, not just because nothing lasts forever – but because, as Moshe said, is it not enough?

## **Refusing the Call**

5 minute read | Straightforward

Before introducing us to Moshe, the Torah describes how Yakov's family grew numerous and how the Egyptian government felt threatened by such a sizable population of outsiders. Determined to curb this threat, they devised a means to enslave the Jewish People, which crept slowly until it was intolerable.

Once the Torah has established the setting, the Torah tells us of Moshe's birth and upbringing before he has to flee. Moshe encounters a mysterious burning bush on his travels, and God calls on him to save his people. Curiously, Moshe refuses this call:

וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלַי וְגַם־רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַלֶּחֶץ אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם לֹחֲצִים אֹתָם: וְעַתָּה לָכֵּה וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אֶת־עַמִּי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' בִּי כִי אֲנֹכִי כִי אֶלֶף אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: ... וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' בִּי: "The cry of the Children of Israel has reached Me; I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Come! I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Children of Israel, from Egypt." But Moshe said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Children of Israel from Egypt?"... Moshe said to God, "Please God, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (3:9-11, 4:10)

This is one of the most important stories ever told. Moshe knows where he comes from and has seen his brethren suffering. His birth and upbringing uniquely situate him between both sides to do



something about it. No less than the Creator has called on him to greatness, and he refuses, not once, but twice!

How could Moshe possibly refuse the call?

Refusing the call is a literary trope that humanizes the hero, but this story isn't ordinary literature. Moshe's refusal is part of this timeless story because it reflects a fundamental property intrinsic to all humans we must acknowledge and understand.

Moshe didn't doubt that his people could or should be saved; Moshe doubted himself. He had fears and insecurities; he was missing an essential trait to be successful! He wasn't a man of words; how would he persuade anybody to follow him? How would he convince the Egyptian government to let his people go? This isn't faux humility – Moshe articulates an accurate self-assessment; he is right! And yet, the Creator answers that it doesn't matter; he must do it anyway.

When the Mishkan was finally ready for inauguration, Ahron also refused the call, feeling ashamed and unworthy for his responsibility for the Golden Calf incident. Yet in the view of our sages, Ahron's shame was exactly what distinguished him as the right person; his self-awareness of his shortcomings and his view of the position as one that required gravity and severity. Moshe never says Ahron is wrong; he only encourages him to ignore those doubts and do it anyway – *אמר לו – שְׁקִיף אֶהְרֵן בּוֹשׁ וַיֵּרָא לְגִשְׁתּוֹ, אָמַר לוֹ – מִשָּׁה, לָמָּה אַתָּה בּוֹשׁ? לָכֵן נִבְחַרְתָּ*.

In the Purim story, Mordechai asks Esther to go the king to save her people and Esther refuses the call, not wanting to risk her life; she has correctly assessed the facts and is indeed in danger. But as Mordechai says, that doesn't matter; if Esther remains paralysed by her fears, she will lose the opportunity to step up. The call to action is open before her; and she must do it anyway – *כִּי אִם-הִחַרְשׁ פִּי תִחְרִישִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת רִוּחַ וְהִצְלָה יַעֲמוּד לַיהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאַתָּה וּבֵית-אָבִיךָ תֵּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם-לָעַת כְּזֹאת הִגַּעְתָּ לְמַלְכוּת*.

The book of Jeremiah opens with a similar vignette. Jeremiah reports that God appeared to him in his youth, and called upon him to be the prophet for his generation; like his forebears, Jeremiah protests that he is just a kid and is not a speaker. In what we can now recognize as a consistent fashion, God dismisses these excuses; not because they are wrong, but because they don't matter – he's got to do it anyway – *וַיְהִי דְבַר-ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: בְּטָרְם אֶצְרָךְ בְּכַטָּן וַיְדַעְתִּיךָ וּבְטָרְם תֵּצֵא מִרְחֹם הַקְּדוֹשִׁים נְבִיא לְגוֹיִם נִתְּתִיךָ: וְאָמַר אֶתָּה אֲדַנִּי הַ הַנְּהָ – לֹא-יְדַעְתִּי דְבַר כִּי-נֶעַר אָנֹכִי: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי אַל-תֹּאמַר נֶעַר אָנֹכִי כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ תִּלְוָה וְאַתָּה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה תִּדְבֹר*.

The Torah is deliberate in how it presents stories; there are lessons in what it leaves in and leaves out. Of all the small interactions that don't make the final cut, we should note that refusing the call is an interaction the Torah consistently deems necessary in multiple unrelated stories; our greatest heroes don't just jump at the chance to do what is clearly the right thing.

Who is perfect enough to fix the problems in your community? Who is perfect enough to lead the people you love to greatness? The Torah seems to endorse and validate this sentiment, insisting that it





## TorahRedux

has got to be you despite your flaws – אֶל־תִּאֲמַר נֶעַר אָנֹכִי. Ironically, the people who are deluded and narcissistic enough to think they are perfect would be the worst candidate; the Torah holds Korach up as the counterexample.

If you have adequately honed your sensitivities, you recognize you have a lot of work to do, and so many people need your help. You might even hear a call to action reverberating deep within. But you doubt yourself, and you refuse the call. You're scared – and you should be! There is plenty to fear, and the stakes couldn't be higher. The undertaking the Torah calls us to is enormous, too enormous to accomplish on our own; yet it calls on us just the same – לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגִמּוֹר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בְּן חוֹרֵינִן לְבִטֹּל מִמְּנָה.

There is moral fiber in quieting the voice of self-doubt and stepping up to answer the call anyway – אִם אֵין אָנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אָנִי.

The Torah calls on humans, keenly aware of our fears, flaws, imperfection, and insecurities. We mustn't engage those self-same fears, flaws, imperfections, and insecurities as excuses to neglect our duty. The Torah repeatedly tells us they don't matter; do it anyway!

Moshe, Ahron, Jeremiah, and Esther all expressed a form of impostor syndrome, the feeling that whatever job you're in, you're not qualified for it and that people will figure out any minute that you're a poser with no clue what you're doing. Your self-awareness serves you well by accurately identifying gaps in your skillset but does you a disservice by stopping you from trying. You have to silence the doubt in yourself when it gets to the point of holding you back from doing transformational things simply because you're not quite ready to face the reality of your own potential greatness.

Our pantheon of heroes is replete with imperfect individuals who had good reasons to refuse the call. Each excuse was entirely accurate; we ought to draw immense comfort and power from how universal self-doubt and uncertainty are. The Torah's consistent thematic response to our doubts, and through them to us, echoing and reverberating for all eternity, is simply that there's work to do, and someone has to do it.

So why shouldn't it be you?

---

## **Randomness Redux**

8 minute read | Advanced

The Purim story unfolded over a protracted period, but we celebrate the holiday on the fourteenth of Adar. The holiday is unusual in the sense that, with most holidays, an event happens on a random date, and we celebrate the date to mark the anniversary of the event; the date is incidental to the



event. That's not quite the case with Purim, whose story revolves around a specific date; the events are almost incidental to the date.

The antagonist, Haman, decided to mandate a legal genocide, a one-day purge against the Jewish People. He had it all figured out; he'd bribe the king, draft the law, and execute it with the king's seal. That's bad, he's bad; it's easy to understand. But in a puzzling turn of events, he wasn't sure about the effective date for his new law, so he cast a lottery to determine the right day and settled on the fourteenth of Adar – על־כֵּן קָרָאוּ לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פּוּרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפּוּר.

Casting lots is distantly removed from our primary experience, but it is a core feature of the story.

Why did Haman cast a lottery?

Today, we understand that a lottery applies randomness to confound any notion of certainty or predictability. When a process can generate all outcomes with equal probability, we will perceive the resulting outcome of that uncertainty as fair. The Torah uses this randomizing methodology to select goats for sacrifice on Yom Kippur and to allocate the tribal lands of Israel.

Today, we would use a coin toss as a conventionally reasonable way to randomly determine two equal choices, heads or tails. It's intuitive, it's fair, it makes sense, and there's nothing to argue about – בְּחִיקָה יוּטַל אֶת־הַגּוֹרֵל וּמֵה' כָּל־מִשְׁפָּטוֹ / מִדְּיָנִים יִשְׁבֵּית הַגּוֹרֵל וּבֵין עֲצוּמִים יִפְרִיד.

Either goat can be the scapegoat; it doesn't matter at all. Which portion of land goes to which tribe doesn't matter. It could be any, which is the point; that's why it's fair. R' Aaron Lopiansky points out that the division of the Land of Israel marks the transition from divine intervention to human-driven action. Although the outcome of the lottery isn't explicitly magical, the outcome will have a spiritual and religious significance, proving that randomness and probability are part of the divine toolkit as well.

Governments don't assign effective dates to legislation randomly. Usually, the effective date of a law is whenever it becomes relevant – it would be relevant to ban a terror group overnight; it would only be appropriate change the tax code years in advance so that everyone has adequate notice.

Unlike the tax code, genocide doesn't have a relevant date. Genocide this week is the same as genocide next summer. There isn't a fairness question that requires randomness to resolve; any given date is already equally random and fair. Haman didn't need a lottery for fair selection or random scheduling.

But that's not the only way the ancients used lotteries.

Ancient civilizations would also cast lots as cleromancy, a form of divination where they would attribute Divine Providence to the outcome – הַשְּׂגָחָה פֶּרֶטִית. By removing human choice and influence over what course of action to take – so the thinking went – destiny and fate could reveal themselves.



The Torah uses this form of lottery to expose a looter, Achan, who illegally claimed spoils in the Book of Joshua; to reveal that Jonathan had violated Saul's command to fast; and by Jonah's Gentile shipmates to identify that the terrible storm was his fault.

Cleromancy, the second form of lottery, has nothing to do with fairness or randomness. It's about ascribing not just certainty but divine significance to an outcome, treating it as the Divine Will, and proceeding accordingly. Achan was the guilty looter and no one else; Jonathan had broken the vow, and not someone else; Jonah, and not some other sailor or passenger, was responsible for the storm. These individuals faced real consequences in the physical world due to the perception of their divinely ordained guilt through cleromancy.

The Torah explicitly forbids utilizing this second form of lottery multiple times in the strongest terms – לא תנחשו ולא תעונו / לא ימצא בך מעביר בנזיבתו באש קסם קסמים מעונו ומנחש ומכשף... פייתועבת ה' כל-עשה אלה ובגלל – התועבת האלה ה' אלקיך מוריש אותם מפניך... תמים תהנה עם ה' אלקיך.

Whether magic is real and that's how it works doesn't matter; what matters is that people ascribe divine significance to cleromancy and act accordingly – that's the kind of superstition the Torah takes significant issue with.

Far more sinister, this is the kind of lottery Haman cast; cleromancy, seeking divine approval for his genocide. As Rashi notes, Haman wasn't simply consulting his sorcery for which moment to start; but which moment he might succeed. The Purim holiday is named for Haman's lottery of cleromancy and divination, his attempt to predict a divinely sanctioned moment for his plot, and arguably, his attempt to abdicate any choice or responsibility in the matter.

The entire story revolves around the comical reversal of Haman's attempt at divination to reduce his uncertainty; God's actual Will guides all outcomes and confounds Haman at every turn. The monstrous and powerful Haman is quickly diminished from the dizzying heights of palace society, helplessly humiliated into a weak and wretched joke on the way down to a shameful death, to be publicly derided and laughed at for all time by the children of history.

The Purim story contains a powerful and timeless moral, that God is concealed in the story but revealed in the outcomes. God alone controls the power of outcomes; the small, improbable outcomes that stack to shape the history and reality we know are one of God's most decisive and signature capabilities – קונה הכל. We can only hope to recognize God's Hand retroactively in hindsight at best and never prospectively, as Haman attempted.

God operates invisibly in the background, orchestrating everything with the power of outcomes; Haman didn't stand a chance, and we know from history that the bad guys never have a chance either – אלא שפכל דור נדור עומדים עלינו לכלותנו, והקדוש ברוך הוא מצילנו מקדם –



We live in a world of possibilities, a probabilistic world, not a magical one. Probability distributions accurately describe our universe and predict the expected outcomes of all possible values; it is the language God speaks to us every day. We can predict how likely something is to happen, but we can only make that prediction in the abstract because God alone has the power of outcomes – הכל בידי שמים.

When Mordechai encourages Esther to go to the king and make her case to save her people, Esther declines initially because she is afraid – and she should be! She is worried because she correctly understands that going to the king uninvited is a gross breach of palace protocol and puts her life in danger.

Mordechai can't tell her that she's wrong or even that she will be fine. He can't say that because he can't possibly know that – or he would say so! Esther is correct about the risk and uncertainty of this proposed course of action, and all Mordechai can say is that someone has to step up, and it might as well be her, but if she won't, someone else will; which is to say that she can choose to do her part, but must leave the rest to God's power of outcomes.

Even once convinced to accept her fate and role, Esther asks Mordechai to have the Jewish People fast and pray for her success. She wasn't sure it would work, and she didn't think she would make it through; she was terrified, and Mordechai couldn't correct or reassure her.

We are probably overly familiar with the story, too numb for Esther's last words to Mordechai to chill our blood the way they deserve – “and if I die, I die.”

Whereas Haman abdicates choice and responsibility to his magical lottery, Esther bravely and deliberately chooses to advocate for her people and courageously resolves to stand before the king, not because she knows she will succeed, but because it is the right thing to do.

Where Haman is a coward who consults a lottery out of fear of failure, Esther puts her best foot forward and takes a chance; the outcome of her last stand no longer matters to her because she has accepted that God alone has the power of outcomes. If she dies, she dies, and salvation must come from somewhere else. Her willingness to give her life to this cause is a moral victory that places her in our pantheon of greats as a heroine worthy of the highest honors.

God alone can see all ends, and God alone can determine ultimate destiny and fate; all we have to decide is what to do with the time and opportunities we are given. Esther is only responsible for her choice to make her stand; she is not responsible for the outcome, which is random, which is to say, in God's hands alone. This does not remove the significance of her choice; it redeems it. Mordechai and Esther's determination to do all they could while depending on and hoping for God's power of outcomes is a complete and total inversion of Haman's attempt to control or force the outcome; their immortal hope stands before us forever – ותקוותם לכל דור ודור.

The Purim story is filled with chance and coincidental events and encounters, like Mordechai foiling an assassination attempt, leading to outcomes of such significance that it is plain to readers that God orchestrated them. God's Hand is not directly perceptible to Mordechai and Esther; but we can see it in lucky events that weave the story together.

Appearances are deceptive, and what you see is not always what you get – our inputs do not always lead to the outcomes we expect or predict, for better and for worse; maybe that's why we dress up in silly costumes and disguises, hiding behind masks. We can get drunk and be vulnerable; we're safe in God's hands.

Chance and probability are the undercurrents of the entire story; they're what the holiday is named for. Purim is the holiday that can never die, and even the somber day of Yom Kippur is but a reflection of Purim. Perhaps everything is like Purim – it looks random, but it's not.

While there is doubt that is a function of concealment – הסתר – the notion of uncertainty itself is a fundamental feature of existence and reality, and it has to be that way. We live within the constraints of a dimension called time – we can only ever exist in the present moment, with no access to the past or future. We can recall the past and forecast and prepare for the future, but that's the best we can do; because uncertainty itself is an iron law of reality and all existence that won't change even in the utopian age of Mashiach.

Haman is descended from Amalek; who not only grapple with doubt and uncertainty but are numerically equivalent, which is to say inextricably linked – עמלק / ספק. But instead of their mistake of reaching into the future in an attempt to dispel uncertainty, we can transform their doubt. The doubt doesn't transform into something else, but like Esther, who learned to act within uncertainty, we can find joy amidst the uncertainties of life as well; satisfaction is the same word as uncertainty if we only look at it differently – ספק / סיפוק.

We believe in God, and God runs the show. But even though Haman can't hurt us, it sure seems like he can; when it looks like people are in danger, we have no choice but to act accordingly. When you face mortal danger, that's scary, and you have to respond. When Haman's plan went public, they correctly recognized it as an imminent catastrophe! No one in the story thought that they just needed to strengthen their faith, that they just needed to trust God to do His thing and sort it all out, and that everything was going to be okay.

Although you don't control the outcome, you must act as if you can do something, like what you do matters, because that's the only thing within your power to do.

If that sounds like our life is theatrics, maybe that's kind of how it is! Our Sages suggest that the Jews were never even in danger; God put on a show for them like they'd put on a show in participating in the feast at the story's outset – לא עשו אלא לפנים אף הקב"ה לא עשה עמהן אלא לפנים.



## TorahRedux

In the reality we inhabit, playing along with the theatre is all we can do. If you have a test tomorrow, you'd better study and make sure you know the material well. Sure, God runs the world, but the probability distributions conclusively demonstrate that people who know the material usually pass; people who don't study typically fail. You might pass or fail, and the test might never ultimately matter in the fullness of your life as it unfolds.

But you won't ever know that sitting in the room, staring at the paper, scratching your head, searching for the answer.

---

*I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.*

*I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond.*

*If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?*

Neli

**PS** - TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. My business, Hendon Advisors, allows me to dedicate time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I source and broker the purchase and sale of healthcare businesses; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers. If you are a buyer of healthcare businesses or can make introductions to healthcare operators who might buy or sell, just reply to this email to get in touch.

**Redux:** *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.