

MINYAN MONTHLY

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Shevat 5751

THE BOOK OF ESTHER --Leon Rogson

The book of Esther was written from a nationalistic, patriotic point of view. Our pride in our abilities to shape our future and defeat our enemies is the core message of the story. The following is a short summary of the story.

Ahasuerus had a great feast and while he attended the men, his queen Vashti dealt with the ladies. On the last day of the feast, the King ordered the queen to show herself to his guests and she refused. The king sent a decree to all provinces announcing his divorcement from Vashti and enforcing the just submission of wives to their husbands!!!

Our sages tell us that Vashti hated the Jewish people. "She used to take Jewish girls and make them work on the Shabbos...When the King sent for her, Hashem made her leprous which is why she refused to go to the King." (Megillah 12b)

Ahasuerus needed a new queen and held a beauty contest to choose one. Mordechai, a 124 year old young man who had been deported by Nebuchanezzar in 597, has his cousin Esther (a 100 years younger) participate in the contest. After a year and some months of intensive review by the King, Esther had her turn with him and won the contest, and the King's heart, and her crown.

Sitting in the King's gate, Mordechai overheard two chamberlains plotting the assassination of the King. He let Ahasuerus know of the plot, the traitors were hung, and the matter was recorded in the royal chronicles.

Haman, a descendant of Agag, the King of Amalek defeated by Saul and later killed by Samuel, became a grand vizier. (According to a midrash, Haman's line was conceived the night after the defeat of Agag. Haman would not have existed if Saul had obeyed G-d and Samuel.)

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A SIMPLE DESULTORY PHILIPPIC
--Mitch Miller

I believe all of us in the Library Minyan have a great regard for hearing and appreciating the effort that our daveners have put into preparing for a service, be it a regular Shabbat service or on the High Holidays. What we want to hear, I believe, is the voice of the davener - not the mechanical, amplified tones of a P.A. system. It is precisely because I appreciate the davener's effort that I am unequivocally opposed to the use of a microphone in the Minyan.

My objections to the use of a microphone can be divided into three categories: halachic, aesthetic, and communal.

First, the halachic issue: While I certainly do not pretend to be an expert on the halacha of microphones, I do know that it is at the least, very problematic, and to many of us, insurmountable. I leave the discussion of the halacha of microphones to others more qualified than I to analyze the problem. However, it is clear that use of a microphone would require a halachic analysis in accordance with established Minyan procedures. Obviously, this has not yet even begun.

Second, aesthetics: When a microphone is used, it becomes the center of attention. Rather than the prayer service being the object of everyone's notice, the microphone becomes that object. The microphone is too tall, it's too short, it falls over, it's not working: it requires a constant stream of attention which totally disrupts the service and destroys all hope of concentration on what the davener is actually doing. Rather than enhancing enjoyment of the service, it detracts from, if not destroys it.

I fully understand that in the Mirror room for High Holidays, acoustics are such that there is interference caused by the shape of the hall, the fact that people are gathered outside in the foyer talking, and so forth. However, I believe these are problems which need to be cured, not by the addition of a microphone, but by greater attention to the arrangement of the seating, the number of people who come to the Minyan service, and to the people talking in the foyer. Last year we made great strides towards solving these problems. I am convinced that if we continue to review them we will make further strides in this direction, which will hopefully eliminate, or at least substantially reduce, the noise problem.

Third, the communal problem: I have always believed, and continue to believe, that one of the prime appeals of the Minyan service is that it is on a human scale. It takes place in a relatively small group setting, and it is easily possible to know (at least by sight) the vast majority of people with whom we daven every week. The fact that we are directly listening to the voice of the davener, or the darshan, or the Torah readers, is specifically what many people are looking for. We do not want the long distance echoes of the public address system. We want the intimacy of being able to be within ear- and eye-shot of the person at the bimah. To add a microphone would be to say we have exceeded that point. We would be no longer a group of people who meet together as a community to pray. We would now just be another mass institution which needs mass communication devices.

The idea that we should have outside speakers in the playground so that the service could be broadcasted is the ultimate extension of this.

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MICROPHONES REVISITED

--Norman H. Green

In the last two issues of the Minyan Monthly, Lida Baker and Joel Grossman begun a lively discussion of the merits and drawbacks of using a microphone in the Minyan's services. Even if these two did nothing for the Minyan, they should be appreciated and commended; in fact both are highly dedicated to the Minyan and its activities.

On the whole, in this discussion, I agree with Joel that the perceived benefits of microphone use are not as great as the disadvantages.

Nevertheless, it may be that he overstates the case. While no more than one Shaliach Tsibur has complained about the lack of a microphone on the High Holy Days, some potential ones have refrained from volunteering because of the lack of a sound system. Even at Sabbath services, some leaders are difficult to hear, and it can be virtually impossible to make use of a melody or niggun not regularly used by the Minyan, sometimes even when an announcement has been made, if a substantial number of people commence singing independently. (Of course, at other times such singing genuinely assists the Shaliach Tsibur.)

I personally have been told that my leadership of services in the main sanctuary has been of higher quality than it usually is in the chapel and that I have even been generally on key. I attribute this to the microphone used there, which enables me to hear myself far better than I can in the chapel.

Yet, if we attempted to fashion a Minyan to fit each member's fantasies of perfection, we would need 200 different Minyanim, an impractical solution. Consequently, we must continue to consider changes in our practices cautiously. Even if traditional understandings of Halacha are not to be given a

NOTES FROM YOUR TORAH GABBAI'IM

--Norm Saiger

--Evan Greenspan

During the Shabbat morning Torah service, before the Torah is actually removed from the Ark and the Shema and the other declarations of faith are recited, our Minyan and many others include an Aramaic meditation beginning with the words "B'rich Shemay d'ma'rai alma"-- "Blessed be the Name of the Sovereign of the Universe". The Aramaic is a bit difficult for a lot of us, and the English somewhat obscure and removed from our experience. I'm sure a lot of us just stand, waiting for things to go forward. But looking at this meditation and this "timing" for its meaning and intention, perhaps there is more some of us can do.

The meditation here in the prayerbook is really an excerpt from the Zohar. It was introduced to the prayer service in the seventeenth century, under the influence of the Kabbalists, whose mystical teachings envisioned a special role for men and women in the relationship of G-d and the Universe. In the Zohar, this

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decisive veto in such a matter, Halachic considerations certainly should not be ignored. To some extent, we should try to consider the possible unanticipated effects of proposed changes, as Joel ably did last month. Further, some weight should be given to the intensity of members' feelings, as well as the mere numbers on each side of such an issue, as we seek some sort of consensus.

Let us hope that other means can be found to solve or alleviate the principal problems that introduction of a microphone would be intended to address.

TREASURER'S COLUMN

--Norman H. Green

Thank you to all of the following people who have paid their Simchas Torah pledges (since I became treasurer):

Arthur Metz & Miriam Bertram
Daniel Ronnie & Hilda Cohen
Glen & Judith D. Massarano
Baruch Link

Thank you to all of the following people who have contributed to the Minyan fund for sponsoring Lyudmilla Orlovskaya and Roman Zverev:

Joel and Fran Grossman
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Donna & Matt Chazanov
Norman and Rachel Green
Marci Maniker-Leiter & Maury Leiter
Milton and Sara Richtman
Kathy & Barry Rosenblatt
David & Tamara Wilkof
Marsha Liss

As of January 15, this fund has received \$772; at least \$5,000 of sponsorship contributions will be needed.

Miller--continued from page 2

Aside from the rather overbearing effect that this would produce on the children, I strongly question whether we want to have our services conducted like the Indianapolis 500, with speakers carrying the sound out to those who can't get good enough seats. If we are truly too big for personal contact, then my reaction would be to give serious thought to dividing the Minyan rather than installing a microphone and sound system.

I certainly sympathize with the Ba'al Tefila who wishes to be appreciated for his or her efforts.

Gabbai'im Notes--continued from p.3
meditation is immediately preceded by the words: "When the Scroll is taken out in the congregation to read therein, the gates of the Heavens of Mercy open, and Celestial Love awakes. It is then fitting for a person to recite this prayer". The prayer itself then proceeds not only with community requests, but also with personal requests of G-d. It is a time of direct communion with the Divine.

In addition to the words of the Zohar, many prayerbooks, ours included, have additional supplication passages, where one can include the mention of their own name, as well as the name of others, in this direct communion. (For the same reason, we use personal names during the recitation of the "Me Sheberach" prayers during the Torah reading, and request special favors of G-d for those ill or for those being honored.) This is a time when we, in our own personal thoughts and prayers, can approach G-d individually.

For those who have never tried this prayer and meditation before, when the ark is open, look it over and try it. And if you want to make a personal appeal for something, this is your chance. The Aramaic concludes:

"May it be Thy will to open our hearts to Thy teaching, and to fulfill the wishes of our hearts and the hearts of all Thy people Israel for good, for life, and for peace. Amen."

But I prefer to hear those efforts with my own ears, and hence be in a position to appreciate the davening all the more, than hear them through the wailing, squeaking, thumping, crackling and booming of a microphone.

Book of Esther--continued from p.1
Everyone bowed down to Haman, except Mordechai who would not bow before either Haman, or the little idol attached to his clothes.

In his rage, Haman decided to kill all Jews and threw lots (Purim) to determine the date. After picking the 14th day of Adar, he went to the king, told him that Jews refused to accept the local laws of Persia, and offered him 10,000 silver talents (\$18,000,000) or two thirds of a year's revenue for the empire, if they were destroyed. The decree was drafted and sent to all the provinces of the empire.

Mordechai and the Jews learned of the decree and mourned. Esther was told by Mordechai of the impending doom. She bravely went to the king unannounced, an act punishable by death. She was well received and invited both Haman and the King to a party. The party went well, and Esther invited her guests to yet another party the day after.

Haman was in very high spirits and boasted of how well the Queen like him. He was very angry when he saw Mordechai at his post in the Kings Gate and built a gallows 83 feet high on which to hang him.

The King, on the other hand, could not sleep. He ordered the royal chronicles read to him (instead of counting sheep) but even this did not help. When the chronicles told the story of Mordechai and the conspiracy, he asked and was told that Mordechai had not been rewarded.

When Haman arrived to ask the King to hang Mordechai, the King asked him how a faithful servant should be rewarded. Thinking himself the faithful servant, Haman replied that the reward should be great honors, to be lead on horseback, attired in royal purple, and with a crier proclaiming the meaning of the afforded honor. The King agreed, and Haman was forced to play the part of the crier, while

Mordechai rode royally behind him on horseback.

Crestfallen, Haman poured his heart out to his wife, and was consoled by being summoned to the Queen's palace.

After a sumptuous meal, the Queen begged for her and her people's life. After becoming acquainted with the details, the King asked in amazement who had concocted this murderous plan, and Esther pointed at Haman. In great agitation, the King left for a moment and Haman prostrated himself on the Queen's couch to ask for her mercy. At that moment the King comes back, becomes enraged at seeing Haman on the Queen's couch, and orders his execution on the gallows prepared for Mordechai.

Mordechai becomes grand vizier, the Jews despoil the gentiles (many of which convert to Judaism in their fright), and everyone lives happily ever after.

Maimonides so valued the book of Esther that he maintained it would remain when all other books of the bible passed away after the coming of the Messiah! It is a short story filled with pride in our capacities to outthink, outfought, and destroy our enemies. In this world so full of peril and sorrow, it is good to let our emotions and our feelings show for at least one day of the year, and to drink until we cannot tell the difference between Blessed by Mordechai and Cursed by Haman!

CONDOLENCES

The Library Minyan extends its heartfelt condolences to Batya Silverman Ordin on the passing of her father.

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SOVA
BRING YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS SOON!**

**INCLUSION OF THE IMAHOT
IN THE AMIDAH BLESSINGS**

--Rabbi Joel Rembaum

In response to some requests for clarification, the following suggestion for the inclusion of the Imahot in the first blessing of the Amidah was approved by the Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

1. After elohei ya'akov add the words, elohei Sarah, elohei Rivkah, elohei Rakhel, veilohei Le'ah;

2. after the term melekh ozer add the word, u-foged;

3. in the hatimah of the Avot blessing, after magen Avraham, add, u-foged Sarah.

**MINYAN STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING**

SUNDAY, MARCY 3, 1991 7:00PM

Issues for Discussion:

- Election of representative to Temple Executive Board
- High Holiday Policies
- Follow-up on Minyan Membership and Historical project

Please Call Robert Braun with additional topics or questions.
(213) 838-4272

WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENT:

Judy Lederich-Mayer and Larry Mayer were married on Nov. 25, 1990 at Valley Beth Israel in Sun Valley, California.

MAZEL TOV!

DUPLEX TO SHARE: If you or someone you know is interested in sharing in a duplex to live in or as an investment, please let me know ASAP. Marsha Liss (714) 624-6718
