



כִּלְעֵי הַחֹדֶשׁ

Clilei HaChodesh

Adar 2 5779

*Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community*

## Matanos La'evyonim - Not Tzedakah! \*

Rabbi Moshe Berger

Towards the end of Hilchos Megillah, Rambam codifies an idiosyncratic Talmudic law regarding the mitzvah of "Gifts to the Poor" (*Matanos La'evyonim*) on Purim: namely, that one fulfills that mitzvah by giving "to anyone who stretches out his hand" [*chol haposhet es yado*] without engaging in the "due diligence" which almsgiving normally requires [*ayn m'dakdekin*].

In other words, on Purim, the mitzvah of almsgiving is indiscriminate. Therefore, Rambam continues, we are not allowed combine monies collected for distribution on Purim with those collected for tzedakah throughout the year.

והייב לחלק לעניים ביום הפורים, אין פחות משני עניים. נתן לכל אחד מתנה אחת או מעות או מיני תבשיל או מיני אוכלין, שנאמר "ומתנות לאביונים" - שתי מתנות לשני עניים. ואין מדקדקין במעות פורים, אלא כל הפושט ידו ליטול, נותנין לו, ואין משנין מעות פורים לצדקה אחרת.

Evidently, the mitzvah of *Matanos La'evyonim* on Purim is not the same as the normal mitzvah of *tzedakah*. The latter mitzvah obligates us to focus upon the objective and certifiable needs of the potential recipient. Such a focus obviously requires due diligence on the donor's part. Everyone's resources are limited, and the donor who fails to ascertain the genuine needs of a potential recipient risks squandering his limited resources on an impostor. The result: every donation which one gives to someone who is undeserving constitutes an act of misappropriation; the indiscriminate donor is stealing, in effect, from those indigents who genuinely need his help.

In contrast, the Purim mitzvah of *Matanos La'evyonim* is not for the purpose of alleviating the genuine financial needs of the recipient. Rather, it is for the purpose of enabling the benefactor to choreograph - to externalize - his deep inner feelings of joy on this day. One way to express happiness is to make others happy, to generate in others one's own inner feelings of thanksgiving and joy. At our personal simchas, for example, our desire is to provide gastronomic delight to all who attend. Our primary goal on such occasions is not to feed only those who are unable to purchase their own food, but rather, to grant pleasure to all who have come to rejoice with us. We are thus excited to feed "all who stretch out their hands" to grasp teriyaki, sushi, etc. Likewise, on Purim we rejoice by delighting (to the best of our abilities) anyone who manifests a desire to receive.

Maimonides reinforces this concept in the Halacha that follows:

*It is preferable for a person to be more liberal with his donations to the poor than to be lavish in his preparations for the Purim feast or in sending portions to his friends. Indeed, there is no greater and more splendid happiness than to gladden the hearts of the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the converts. One who brings joy to these unfortunate individuals resembles the Divine presence...*

מוטב לאדם להרבות במתנות אביונים מלהרבות בסעודתו ובשלוח מנות לרעיו, שאין שם שמחה גדולה ומפוארה אלא לשמח לב עניים ויתומים ואלמנות וגרים, שהשמחה לב האמללים האלו דומה לשכינה, שנאמר "להחיות רוח שפלים ולהחיות לב נדכאים".

According to Rambam, therefore, the function of *Matanos La'evyonim* on Purim is to catalyze the joy of the benefactor. The actual benefit he provides to the recipients is a means to that ends.

Anyone working for a tzedakah will attest to the fact that there is very little joy in the process of due diligence – of insisting, for example, that the candidate fill out multiple application forms and provide the last two years' tax returns. The mitzvah of tzedakah - insofar as it requires us to actualize social welfare to the greatest extent possible - demands precisely that sort of insistence.

Purim is different; on that day we are mandated to maximize our own joy by delighting others - i.e., by satisfying the desires - the subjective needs - of anyone who offers us a (recipient's!) hand.

\*This essay follows the opinion of Rambam. Some halachic authorities disagree, and are of the opinion that *Matanos L'Evyonim* is considered *Tzedakah*.

First published at <https://torahfountain.com/chaqim-holidays-yomim-tovim/purim/142-matanos-la-evyonim-not-tzedakah.html>

## What does the Swiss guard have to do with Achashverosh's insomnia?

Jeffrey Lautman

As I have been preparing for the holiday of Purim, I have been reading over the Megillah.

In the beginning of the sixth chapter, Achashverosh is unable to sleep. The chapter starts out with the phrase "בלילה ההוא - On that night." I started to wonder: Why specifically that night?

To answer that question, we have to travel further back into the story, to chapters 2, 3, and 5.

In the beginning of chapter 3, Haman is chosen as the king's viceroy. The Megillah really doesn't give us much history about him. What were his qualifications for the job?

The first sentence of chapter 3 offers just one phrase and one word to describe his qualifications.

The phrase is "אחר הדברים האלה," that Haman was promoted "after these things," and the one word to describe him is "Agagi."

The midrash takes the first phrase of the sentence as referencing the events in chapters 1 and 2, including the death of the previous queen and the selection of Esther as the next queen – events in which Haman played a role, by his other name, Memuchan (Megillah 12b). The phrase "after these things" follows most immediately after Mordechai foiled a plot against the king at the end of chapter 2, suggesting Haman was promoted because he was a sneak who stole the credit that belonged to Mordechai (see Malbim).

But why are we told that he was an Agagi? How does that explain why he got the job?

To answer that, ask yourself: Who guards the Pope? The answer is the Swiss Guard. Why? Are there no soldiers in Italy?

The Swiss Guard was chosen precisely because they were not Italian. Because the Pope may have enemies, people who carried a claim or a vendetta against him, a foreign guard was selected to be completely loyal to him. Other kings throughout history have done the same.

Similarly, Achashverosh chose a foreigner, one who had no alliances and therefore was completely loyal to him.

Consider that foiled coup at the end of chapter 2. Bigtan and Teresh were known as *shomrei hasaf*, mid-level players who acted out of anger against Achashverosh. In those days, kings rarely got to live out their life in peace and serenity but often faced assassins and conspirators within their own courts.

Achashverosh must have suspected that there were also conspirators in the group at the *shaar hamelech*.

Now, skip ahead to chapter 5, where Esther invites Achashverosh and Haman to 2 parties, and pay attention to the words and the *trop*.

The first invitation is extended to the king in third person, and Haman is invited because of his position as a viceroy. The *trop* on Haman's name is the nondramatic *Zakef Katan*.

There is a subtle change in the invitation to the second party. Now, Queen Esther requests that the king and Haman should come to the party she is making for the **both** of them! The *trop* on Haman now is more dramatic – a *Rivii*, which is slow and downwardly descending.

No doubt, Achashverosh would have picked up on this subtlety and wondered about the queen's regard for Haman.

At the end of chapter 5, Haman is perturbed about Mordechai and that distress casts a shadow on his success. He shares the problem in a gathering at his home with his wife, Zeresh, and a group of people known as "אוהביו," a word with many subtle shades and tones. The word "אוהביו" means more than friends and more than supporters. It means people who show loyalty to him. This is exactly the opposite of what Achashverosh would have wanted: Haman is becoming popular in his own right – a threat to Achashverosh.

At that gathering of Haman's loyal supporters, Zeresh advises him to build a very tall gallows and talk to the king in the morning about using them for Mordechai.

I would presume that Haman's abode is not far from Achashverosh's palace. I would presume that Achashverosh could see such a tall gallows. And he has not yet been told who the gallows are for.

I would presume that going to sleep that night would have been quite difficult for a king who is always looking over his shoulder, who just observed the construction of a public gallows by his viceroy – a man he'd considered loyal, but who has been gaining independent popularity – quite near to his palace.

And he might have lost a little sleep that night, thinking about the position and loyalty of his "Swiss Guard."

---

**Contact Ronnie Shulman for sponsorship opportunities**

(614) 507-3855

[rshulman1@gmail.com](mailto:rshulman1@gmail.com)

---

**Rabbi Moshe Berger**

Scholar in Residence

(216) 533-5233

[moshe@mmbberger.com](mailto:moshe@mmbberger.com)

**Leslie Seiger**

Facilitator

(216) 392-8966

[leslie.seiger@sbcglobal.net](mailto:leslie.seiger@sbcglobal.net)

**Sarah Rudolph**

Editor

(216) 291-8918

[scdrudolph@gmail.com](mailto:scdrudolph@gmail.com)

---

### YOUNG ISRAEL OF GREATER CLEVELAND

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein, *Rabbi*

Rabbi Aharon Lebovics, *Associate Rabbi (Hebrew Academy)*

Jeffrey Belkin, *President*

**Beachwood Branch**  
2463 S. Green Road  
Beachwood, Ohio 44122

**Hebrew Academy Branch**  
1860 S. Taylor Road  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

