

PurimBurst, 2002 / 5762

Inspired by R. Tsadok HaKohen, *Pri Tsadik*, Adar 11; R. R. M. Luria, *Ora v'Simcha*, (p. 97-99)

Letters were sent...to all the kings provinces...to destroy, slay, and exterminate all Jews on the 13th of Adar [11 months from then]...Mordekhai immediately bid Esther to approach the king, to plead for her people...[Esther proposed an alternative strategy, preferring to wait for the king to invite her at his own initiative] "All royal attendants are barred from entering the kings chambers unbidden," she replied. "To do so means certain death unless the king extends his scepter and allows the intruder to live. It is now already thirty days since I was last summoned by the king."...Mordekhai replied, "If you persist in keeping silent at this time relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from some other place while you and your father's house will perish. (Esther 3:12 – 4:14).

Why did Mordekhai insist that Esther go *now*, unbidden? Esther agreed to approach the king but wanted to wait until called by him, which would surely be soon. Why imperil her life needlessly? *Halacha* forbids one from taking unnecessary mortal risks. Since the genocidal decree would not take effect for nearly a year, it did not seem to justify a life-threatening exploit. Mordekhai's gamble only makes sense to those who know the secret, that Purim is one with the Oral Torah.¹

HaShem revealed two Torot at Sinai: the written text and its oral explanations, which include all the levels of implication intended by each word.² The lights of every teaching that would (and could) ever unfold from these first Five Books all descended in that blazing moment of revelation.³ In chassidic writings, Oral Torah is a code word for each person's unique perspective on truth that is *their* "letter of the Torah."

The Written Torah was a gift of guidance on a silver platter; the Oral Torah "is only truly acquired by one who dies for it."⁴ Yet, as we know, there are two kinds of death: physical death and ego death, and the latter is more bitter than the former. In ego death, one lives with discomfort day in, and day out. Unlike physical death it does not bring release, rather the opposite. In ego death one stews in the juices of pain, frustration or humiliation until a solution be found, which might simply be a shift in attitude, behavior, or circumstance. At worst, relief might only arrive with the moment of death.

The Written Torah specifies three very limited circumstances where one must be willing to "die for it," and the death here mentioned is a physical one.⁵ In all other instances life takes precedence, and one is *required* to transgress the Torah's law to save one's skin.⁶ In contrast, the Oral Torah requires a *constant* willingness to endure ego death as the non-negotiable precondition to acquiring its sweet, soul-satisfying truths. One must be willing to bear physical privation, indignities, and forego all manner of ego-gratification when truth and integrity require that path.⁷

At Sinai we accepted our written law with open arms. "Whatever you ask from us, HaShem, we will gladly do; and trust that it will eventually make sense."⁸ But the Oral Torah was a whole different matter. Who could accept its ultimatum of unrelenting self-sacrifice? That would be suicidal. Yet HaShem did not take no for an answer. Instead He coerced us with blinding revelations that reduced all negative options to nonsense.⁹ We agreed, but a contract entered under duress is not legally binding.¹⁰

Mordekhai understood that the time had come for Israel to accept their Oral Torah with whole and willing hearts. Yet why should now be different? Its price tag had not changed. Esther was the key. Mordekhai saw that she could bring down the lights that would open the hearts of her people to the wondrous blessing of their Oral Torah. If just once, they could taste its nectar, they'd be hooked. There is no purer joy than discovering truth. And since, as the Talmud declares, "There is no truth except Torah,"¹¹ whenever a person learns a lesson or grows from their suffering, they generate a piece of the Oral Torah.

Kabbala refers to the Oral Torah's lights as *resurrecting dew*¹² for two reasons:

1. Unlike rain which obviously descends from above, dew seems to appear out of nowhere, from below. Similarly, the written Torah obviously came from HaShem in a moment of heavenly revelation. Not so the Oral Torah, defined as the cumulative body of creative insights pressed from the hearts of Jews striving to live with integrity to the truths they absorbed at Sinai.¹³ These epiphanies also seem to arise on their own, from below, from the person themselves. It is not obvious that they too are divinely bestowed.
2. Nature abhors a vacuum. As soon as an empty space appears it exerts a force that draws into itself exactly those lights that match *its* particular shape. A master of prayer knows the secret of crafting vessels, of sculpting lack into potent configurations of empty space. Yet these drops of supernal sweetness, called the Oral Torah, originate in the highest realms of Divine reverie. There is only one vessel with enough vacuum-power to tug those lights down into this world. That vessel is ego-death (and also physical death when it sanctifies G-d's name). The dew, when it descends, revives the soul. The person returns to life, resurrected, renewed, enlightened, and transformed.

Mordekhai insisted that Esther go, *now*, precisely because of the peril entailed. When Esther entered the king's chamber unbidden, she risked physical death, and faced certain ego death, for at that moment she lost the possibility of ever resuming her marriage to Mordekhai, of ever again knowing his embrace.¹⁴ Her fate was sealed. She must live out her days as Achashverosh's wife.

Mordekhai chose Esther for the task because he saw that she was not just a person, she was a *metasoul*. Through her the Jewish people were held together as a higher order unity called the mystical body of Israel. Their souls were so entwined with hers that the resurrecting dew she pulled down as the fruit of her self-sacrifice opened every heart to their Oral Torah. Mordekhai's plan worked. קימו וקבלו¹⁵ – The Jews accepted their Oral Torah in joyful celebration, with free and willing hearts.

Let it be your will, Hashem, that on this holy Purim, when inebriation also counts as ego death, that we draw down Your most prized stash of resurrecting dew called the Torah of mashiach, with it paradigm shifting secrets about how to purge evil without also destroying healthy flesh. This much we've learned: You can't nuke it, you can't sit at a table and negotiate with it, and you can't ignore it. There *is* a solution but its lights are not in the universe yet. They are waiting for an empty-space-of-longing that has enough vacuum-power to pull them through. All the resources of the Jewish people (material, emotional, mental and spiritual) are focused on this question and dedicated to its task. May the vessel created by our combined efforts and accumulated ego deaths—by the broken hearts of our mourners, the broken lives of our wounded, the daily sacrifice of all who bear the yoke of Torah, the sleepless nights of our leaders who carry the burden of life and death on their shoulders—may all this finally pull down the dew of relief, salvation, and mashiach NOW.

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⁸ Shabbat 88a; Pri Tsadik, Adar [1].

⁹ TB. Brochat 5a.

¹⁰ Sifra 105a; TB Megillah 9b; TY Peah 2:4; Torat Kohanim (end of Bekukhotai); Midrash Tehillim (Mizmor 12).

¹¹ TB Brochat 43b, Torah Temima on Bmidbar 19:14, Tanchuma on Bereshit.

¹² Rambam, Mishna Torah, Sefer HaMada 5:2.

¹³ Ibid. 5:1

¹⁴ See ff 4.

¹⁵ Exodus 24:8.

¹⁶ TB Shabbat 88a; Maharal, Or Chadash.

¹⁷ TB Shabbat 88a.

¹⁸ TY Rosh Hashanah 3:8.

¹⁹ Tikunei Zohar 19; TB Shabbat 88b, Pri Tsadik, Adar [1].

²⁰ The Oral Torah includes two primary categories. The first is the authoritative chain of tradition that started with Moses and passes from mouth to ear, master to disciple, from Sinai until today. (Sifra 105a). The second is the accumulated wisdom of individual Jews from that point onward, no matter what their standing in the community or level of religious observance. (Pri Tsadik, Chanukha, [2], p. 143; Adar [1]; and many other places.)

²¹ TB Megilla 13a.

²² Esther 9:27.