

Purim

The Perfect Ending

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We conclude the Megillah reading every year by singing "*Shoshanas Yaakov*." One would experience difficulty in finding a more appropriate poem to conclude our recital of the Megillah – the chronicle that epitomizes so many aspects of our miraculous history in two-thousand years of exile. "*The rose of Yaakov was triumphant and joyous...*"

But, ironically, the perfect concluding note to the Megilla ends with an awkward anticlimax. "*Vegam Charvona zachur letov*." Charvona, an officer of Achashverosh, played only a minor role in the story of Purim. Why do we conclude *Shoshanas Yaakov* with a statement that "Charvona should be remembered favorably?"

Charvona appears twice in the Megillah. He participates in the delegation sent to invite Vashti to Achashverosh's party, and he suggested to the king that Haman should be hanged on the tree he constructed to hang Mordechai upon. The two events appear to have little in common, and only the second action can even attempt to answer why we should remember Charvona favorably. Even this, though, cannot explain why Charvona should be recognized above any of several other characters who drove events to their Divinely guided outcome.

A closer examination reveals a common denominator between the two events. Both were actions of evil men's plans carried to their inevitable self-destructive conclusion – pristine examples of "*middah kneged middah*." Achashverosh promoted a platform of uninhibited multiculturalism. Every man at the party would be fed according to his desires – no one would be forced to partake of anything against his will. The philosophy sounds utopian until one remembers that people's desires often conflict. Vashti's refusal reminded Achashverosh of this detail in embarrassing fashion. Achashverosh's determination to provide pleasure for everyone produced his humiliation and the, later regretted, murder of his wife. There is no need to explain the *middah kneged middah* in Charvona's second role; "hanged on his own tree" still remains a popular idiom.

Two opinions suggest Charvona's identity: either a henchman of Haman, or Eliyahu haNavi. Both identities reflect this idea. That Charvona was Haman's henchman highlights the *middah kneged middah* aspect of Haman's downfall. Eliyahu HaNavi will usher us into the Messianic era when all the wicked will be finally destroyed by their evil.

"Hanged on his own tree." In essence that is the message of Purim. When we are in the darkness of exile and evil seems entrenched on heights overlooking us, Purim reminds that G-d only allows their temporary success in order to destroy them eternally. We announce this every week on the day that acts as a reminder of God's providence. We state in Mizmor Shir Leyom HaShabbos: "*bifro'ach reshaim kimo eisev ... lehishamdani adei ad* – when the wicked sprout like grass, it is to destroy them for all eternity." By contrast, "*tzaddik catamar yifrach*," the fruits of righteous living blossom slowly, but what can compare to their sweetness?

One could not find a more appropriate capstone to the celebration of Purim than the enduring message of Charvona. When we read a newspaper or see any other perpetrator of evil at large (it is unfortunate the two are synonymous), let us remember Charvona's message – Purim's.