

Shiur #09: The Casting of the Lot

By Dr. Jonathan Grossman

As noted in the previous shiur, Haman extends his decree of annihilation to all of the Jews, not sufficing with removing Mordekhai from his position or even putting him to death. This recalls the first violator of a royal command in the narrative – Vashti – since the decree promulgated in the wake of her refusal likewise applies to all women and not only to her personally. However, this parallel serves to highlight an interesting difference between the two cases. In chapter 1, all women are required to give honor to their husbands, but Vashti personally is also punished and removed from her position in the palace (perhaps put to death). In chapter 3, in contrast, Haman decides to vent his anger on all of the Jews, but for some reason he seems to "forget" Mordekhai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. How are we to understand the fact that Haman fails to have Mordekhai executed, along with extending his decree to all of the Jews? The narrative gives us a hint as to the answer to this puzzle: "It was disdainful in his eyes to lay his hand upon Mordekhai alone – for they had told him of Mordekhai's nationality; so Haman sought to annihilate all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Achashverosh, Mordekhai's people." (3:6) According to this verse it would seem that harming Mordekhai alone is of trifling value in Haman's eyes; he seeks to harm all of the Jews. In the statement, "For they had told him of Mordekhai's nationality" (3:4), the reader hears an echo of Mordekhai's revelation to the servants of the king: "For he had told them that he was a Jew" (3:4). It is reasonable to deduce that Haman extends his decree to all of the Jews because he perceives Mordekhai's refusal to bow to him as being profoundly connected to the fact that he is a Jew, to his national identity. At the same time, the answer given in the text fails to answer our question: even if harming Mordekhai seems too light a punishment, in Haman's eyes, why does he not add to the extension of the decree the seemingly obvious execution of Mordekhai? In other words, why does the decree against all of the Jews replace the execution of Mordekhai, rather than supplementing this most elementary and anticipated punishment?

It is certainly possible that Mordekhai occupies a very powerful position in the royal court, and that Haman is not convinced that he will be able to assault him or his status. It is difficult to imagine that Mordekhai's status is equal to that of Haman; nevertheless, the language of the text – "It was disdainful in his eyes" – hints at a political, pragmatic difficulty that faces Haman in his quest to punish Mordekhai. In any case, extending the decree to all the Jews is, as Haman sees it, the easiest way of removing Mordekhai from the king's gate, since the decree of annihilation will apply to him, too, and he will not be able to save himself.[1]

To establish a date for all the Jews to be slaughtered, Haman casts a lot.[2] Some scholars suggest that verse 7, describing the casting of the lot, is transposed and squeezed into an unnatural place; it would seem logical that only after Haman received the king's approval would he cast the lot. But actually this is not difficult to understand; on the contrary, the fact that Haman casts the lot even before receiving the king's permission to kill the Jews,

presents him as someone altogether confident of his power to persuade the king to accede to his plan.[3]

Seemingly, we could treat this fact as a trivial matter that plays no significant role in the development of the plot or the message of the narrative. However, for some reason it is specifically this mundane detail – the way in which the date of annihilation is chosen – that became the focus of the festival, as reflected in its name (Purim = lots). The prevailing view among scholars is that Esther was written for the sole purpose of explaining the name of the festival – Purim. This claim rests principally upon the verses that are read towards the end of the Megilla: "Therefore they called these days Purim, on account of the lot (pur); therefore, because of all the words of this letter" (9:26).[4] Even those who do not accept this view cannot ignore the fact that the name of the festival is related to the casting of the lot, and as such it imbues the act with special importance. As noted, within the narrative itself this detail appears quite unimportant, a sort of sprinkling of drama and tension. But we may assume that through the casting of the lot, the narrator hints at a principle to which he is giving voice, if only in a concealed way.

Moreover, after the casting of the lot, the narrator does not reveal what date was chosen! The exact date – the 13th of Adar – is mentioned only in the citation of Haman's letter, further on in the chapter (verse 13).[5] Perhaps the narrator seeks thereby to draw the reader's attention to the month in which the lot falls – the twelfth month (a fact that is mentioned already at this stage), rather than the exact day. This causes the reader to note that the lot falls upon the most distant month possible: Haman casts the lot "in the first month, which is the month of Nissan." However, it is also possible that by ignoring the outcome of the lot, the narrator is focusing the reader on the actual process of casting the lot, rather than on the date thereby chosen for annihilation. What, then, is the significance of casting the lot?[6]

"In the first month, which is the month of Nissan, in the twelfth month of the reign of Achashverosh, a pur – that is, a lot – was cast before Haman, from day to day and from month to month, to the twelfth month – the month of Adar." (3:7)

The date of Haman's casting of the lot ("In the first month – the month of Nissan") apparently holds some literary significance: it links Esther with the Exodus from Egypt.[7] But the date also appears to be connected to the historical, real perspective of the story: in Babylon and in the Sumerian environment in general, it was customary to celebrate the first ten days of the year – starting in the month of Nissan – with feasts marking the new year. This was the most important festival, with huge parties and gatherings taking place, not only in the temples for elitist religious priests. An account detailing the celebrations worshipping the god Mardukh (whose name is connected to the name Mordekhai, as we have noted previously) has been preserved. For our purposes we shall emphasize two motifs found in these texts:

a. The king himself played a central and active role in the new year celebrations, with the climax of the festival being the king's entry into the temple of the god Mardukh (on the 6th of Nissan). There, the priest would remove the king's royal regalia (scepter, ring, crown), and the king – bowing to the ground – would have to declare that he had not sinned nor been negligent in fulfilling his obligations towards "your great godliness." On the 9th of Nissan the idol of Mardukh was brought out of the temple in an impressive public ceremony, and the people would drink and dance. On the next day, the 10th of Nissan, the idol would return to its place.

b. The New Year was perceived by the ancient Babylonian as the time when fates were determined for the entire year. Once the idol Mardukh was returned to its place, the priests would cast various lots in order to ascertain what was expected to happen during the course of the year.[8]

It is reasonable to assume that the lot cast by Haman, in the first month, is directly related to this ritual.[9] Careful attention should be paid to the wording: "... which is the lot – before Haman"; apparently a priest cast the lot on his behalf, before him, by his invitation.[10]

It should be emphasized that the fundamental assumption underlying the pagan casting of lots is that there are days that are determined (or chosen by the gods) from the beginning of the year for success or for punishment. When Haman's lot turned up the 13th of Adar, he believed that this day was one that was marked for punishment (as indeed it was – but "it was reversed," and the punishment was inflicted upon the enemies of Israel.)

Beyond the historical, real context of the casting of lots, it would seem that from a literary perspective it is no coincidence that in the battle between Haman and Mordekhai use is made of the lot. We recall that already at the stage of presenting the characters it was emphasized that Mordekhai belonged to the Tribe of Binyamin: "There was a Jewish man in Shushan, the capital, and his name was Mordekhai, son of Yair, son of Shim'i, son of Kish – of the Tribe of Binyamin" (2:5). The world of magic, sorcery, diviners etc. – clung to Rachel and her sons, whether by choice or against their will:

a. Rachel herself stole her father's terafim (Bereishit 31:19-36). Apparently, the terafim – a sort of family god[11] – were used in some way to reveal hidden things (cf. Yechezkel 21:26). We recall that Lavan says of himself that he uses the world of magic: "I divined, and God has blessed me because of you" (30:27.)

b. Yosef, Rachel's elder son, experiences dreams (not prophecies!) and knows how to interpret them. He is so proficient in this art that he is known by this title – "the dreamer" (Bereishit 37:19). The entire course of his life – his fall and revival in Egypt – is connected to dreams and their interpretation.

c. It is in the hands of Binyamin, Yosef's blood brother born of Rachel, that Yosef's goblet is found; Yosef (as the viceroy of Egypt) uses this goblet for "divining" (Bereishit 44:5).[12]

d. Yonatan, the son of Shaul, engages in divining during the war against the Philistines in Mikhmash. As he ascends to the Philistine garrison with his attendant, he says: "If they say thus to us: Wait, until we come to you – then we will stand and not go up to them. But if they say: Come up to us, then we shall go up, for God will have given them into our hand, and that will be our sign" (I Shemuel 14:9-12). The Sages[13] view this as the classic example of divining.

e. Mikhal, the daughter of Shaul, hides in David's bed "the terafim... and the pillow of goats' hair" (I Shemuel 19:13). Apparently, these were used for divining,[14] and it is possible that Mikhal had brought them from the house of her father, Shaul, and that they were not from David's own home.

f. Shaul himself goes to consult with the medium prior to his battle against the Philistines (I Shemuel 28.)

To this list we may add Mordekhai – "the son of Yair, son of Shim'i, son of Kish – of the Tribe of Binyamin." But Mordekhai is on the other side; he must confront the world of lots

and divinations. He does not cast the lot; on the contrary, through his fasting and penitence he seeks to overturn the fate that the lot has decreed.

Before Shaul goes to consult the female medium, the text emphasizes that he "asked of God, but God did not answer him – neither in dreams, nor through the Urim, nor through prophets" (I Shemuel 28:6). This verse would appear to characterize most accurately the biblical attitude towards use of the world of magic, in its various forms: it is an attempt to by-pass the direct encounter with God, using the spiritual powers that exist in reality in order to know the future. The world of magic holds greater attraction and power at a time of exile of the Divine Presence, when there is no prophecy. Yosef, who rules over Egypt at the beginning of the Israelite exile, understands dreams, but does not merit prophecy. Likewise it is no coincidence that one of the central themes of Daniyyel, a narrative that takes place just a short time prior to the period of Esther, is the dream. When Yonatan ascends to the Philistine garrison, the text emphasizes that "Achiya, son of Achituv... bearer of the breastplate, and the people did not know that Yonatan had gone" (I Shemuel 14:3). The breastplate [of the High Priest, the means of direct communication with God] is not in Yonatan's hands, and so he must appeal to divination for help. Likewise, as noted, Shaul turns to magical powers for help when the channel of prophecy is closed to him.

Since Esther is an exile narrative,[15] the general atmosphere of the story is highly conducive to this world of casting lots and divining what fate has in store.[16] But, interestingly enough, Mordekhai – who is a descendant of Rachel and of Binyamin – here confronts the lot of Haman, by calling for a day of fasting and penitence![17]

Two "New Years"

As noted, Haman's lot is cast as part of the new year celebrations, apparently on the 10th (or perhaps the 11th) of Nissan. "A hundred and eighty days" (six months) prior to that would have been the 10th of Tishrei – Yom Kippur, an important part of the Israelite new year commemoration,[18] the nation of Israel likewise casts "lots". The narrator may be underlining this connotation and encouraging a comparison between the two lots. On the same day when the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies, dressed in his special white clothing, with his declaration "I have sinned", he also casts lots in the Temple: "Aharon shall place lots upon the two goats – one is destined for God, and the other is destined for Az'azel" (Vayikra 16:8). As we have already noted, some regard the story of Esther as a mirror-image of Yom Kippur.[19] The king's palace, with its outer court and inner court, is reminiscent of the structure of the Temple; these two areas cannot be approached unless one is called upon by the king – and then one must wear "royal garments" and wait for the king to extend his scepter, for otherwise one's life is in danger.[20] To all of the above we may add a most important similarity – the casting of lots. Before examining the different manner in which the lots are cast, it is interesting to compare the two new years (Babylonian vs. Israelite):[21]

Babylonian new year:

- a. In Nissan
- b. The king enters the Holy of Holies
- c. The king removes the symbols of royalty (scepter, ring, crown etc).
- d. The king's declaration: "I have not sinned, O master of the lands; I have not been negligent in fulfilling obligations towards your godliness. I have not destroyed Babylon, nor have I commanded over its ruin; I have not harmed Esagila, I have not forgotten its

worship, I have not struck the cheek of any one of her sons, with their sanctified rights; nor have I humiliated them”.

e. Casting of lots to determine what the new year holds.

Israelite New Year:

a. In Tishrei

b. The kohen enters the Holy of Holies

c. The kohen removes his priestly garments (which are "royal garments" for him), and enters in white garments

d. The kohen declares:[22] "I pray You, Lord! I have transgressed, I have performed iniquity, I have sinned before You – both I and my household. I pray You, Lord – please grant atonement for the transgressions, iniquities and sins that I have transgressed, performed and sinned before You, I and my household...." Afterwards he would say: "I pray You, Lord – Your people, the house of Israel, have transgressed, performed iniquity and sinned before You”.

e. Casting of lots for the goats

Along with the interesting similarity between the two ceremonies, attention should also be paid to the fundamental differences between these two different approaches to the New Year. The Babylonian New Year is characterized by a renewed coronation of the king. As such the king presents himself before his god, declares that he has not – heaven forefend – committed any wrongdoing, and receives authority and approval for an additional year of reign. In honor of the occasion, people are permitted to view the secrets of the future and to discover which dates have been set for each and every event, to discover the qualities of time which will now not be able to be changed. At the Israelite New Year, in contrast, it is the King of kings Who is coronated. As part of the rites commemorating the New Year, atonement is performed for God's Temple and for all of His subjects. Here, the kohen confesses his transgressions and sins in order that these may be forgiven. It is in accordance with the actions – religious and moral – of the Israelite that his fate for the year is determined, but even this is not final, and at any time he may return to God.

The determinist New Year of the Babylonians is confronted by the moral New Year of the Israelite.[23] Haman's fate is drowning in drink – at the New Year celebrations, as were customary in Babylonian culture, as well as in the results of the specific lot that is cast in Esther – "The king and Haman sat down to drink." In complete contrast, the Israelite lot is cast on a fast day, a day of affliction of the soul. This difference is not an insignificant one; it hints at the profound chasm separating the concept of fate as viewed in the two traditions. The casting of a lot can hint to two opposite and contradictory positions. One – the Persian view represented in the person of Haman – maintains that there are things (for our purposes, days or times) that are fixed and determined, and the request of the person who casts the lot can only succeed if it is aligned with those predetermined times. The other position – finding expression in the Israelite casting of the lot on Yom Kippur – is quite the opposite: nothing is fixed in advanced; everything is in the hands of heaven. In casting the lot the supplicant brings his hands together, leaving the scene open to Divine action and intervention.

Haman's lot of the 10th of Nissan is carried out in the midst of drinking. The atmosphere is one of a pagan, deterministic view that has no regard for a person's moral standard. A person may exploit the forces that are active in the world and harness them – along with the gods themselves – for his ends, to fulfill his wishes. Once he has succeeded in

uncovering the fixed laws of the world, he may become drunk and immerse himself in debauchery.

The casting of the lot by the High Priest on the 10th of Tishrei is carried out on a fast day, in the midst of confession and repentance. The challenge of the fast is connected, of course, to the challenge posed by Him Who demands of man to act according to certain standards of morality. The casting of the lot represents leaving the decision in the hands of "He Who spoke - and the world came into being"; He will watch over reality and intervene in light of the moral and religious behavior of those who believe in Him.

Haman's fate was overturned. His deterministic world, ruled by fixed rules and unchangeable times, was acted upon by the God of Israel, Who turned the events upside down.[24] In this sense, one might almost say that this is the most important message of Esther: the God of Israel enjoys complete freedom to decide how to run His world, and as such He is able to prevail over lots and set fates.

Division of the Land by Lots

We encounter a biblical commandment to cast lots once again in the division of the inheritances in the land among the tribes: "Among these shall the land be divided as inheritance, by the number of names. To the more numerous [tribe] shall you give a greater inheritance, and to the fewer – you shall give a smaller inheritance; each [tribe] shall be given an inheritance in accordance with his number. But the land shall be divided by lots, by the names of the tribes of their fathers shall they inherit it. According to the lot shall you divide its inheritance between many and few" (Bamidbar 26:53-56).[25] Apparently, each tribe had the location of its inheritance determined by lot, while the internal distribution among the families comprising each tribe was carried out according to socialist principles – in accordance with the size of each family.

The significance of this casting of the lot is, apparently, the introduction of an absolute dimension into the division of the land. It is not human discretion that awards this piece of land to this tribe, and a different inheritance to another tribe, but rather all is determined by God. This is the message that is conveyed by the story of the daughters of Tzelofchad. After it has been decided that they will inherit the land that their father would have received (since he left no sons), the heads of their family and tribe approach Moshe and complain about the injustice that is likely to be caused to their tribe if the daughters of Tzelofchad marry out of their tribe: "The heads of the households of the family of the children of Gilad, son of Makhir, son of Menasheh, of the families of the children of Yosef, approached, and the spoke before Moshe and before the princes, the heads of the households of the children of Israel. And they said: God has commanded my lord to give the land in inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by God to give the inheritance of Tzelofchad, our brother, to his daughters. But if they will become wives of the members of the [other] tribes of Israel, then their inheritance shall be deducted from the inheritance of our forefathers, and shall be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they shall marry, and it shall be deducted from the lot of our inheritance" (Bamidbar 36:1-4). And indeed, out of concern that an inheritance might end up being transferred from one tribe to another, the Torah stipulates that a woman who inherits her father's land must marry someone from her own tribe, such that the inheritance remains in the hands of the same tribe.[26]

The words of the kinsmen of Tzelofchad convey an emphasis that demands some explanation: "My lord commanded that the land be given as inheritance by lots." Seemingly, this has nothing to do with the legal problem at hand. Even if the tribal inheritances were to have been divided on the basis of human discretion, the same problem would still exist, were the inheriting daughters to marry outside of their own tribe. It would seem, therefore, that this represents the religious basis for the claim by the family of Gilad from the Tribe of Menasheh: it is specifically because the inheritances are divided by lot (i.e., the division is in God's hands) that the tribal borders should be preserved with care. As noted, the fact that the process is carried out by means of lots introduces an absolute dimension into the division; it dare not be changed in any way, under any circumstances.

At first glance the above instance looks identical to Haman's lot, in Israelite garb: there is the casting of the lot whose outcome permits no appeal, spiritual worlds that set down absolute determinism. To clarify the difference, let us consider the casting of lots that takes place in the Book of Yehoshua: "Yehoshua commanded those who went to mark the land, saying: Go, walk about in the land and mark it, and return to me; here I shall cast lots for you before God at Shilo. So the men went and passed through the land... and they came to Yehoshua at the camp in Shilo. Then Yehoshua cast lots for them at Shilo before God, and Yehoshua divided the land there for the children of Israel in accordance with their divisions" (Yehoshua 18:8-9). The text emphasizes a number of times that the lot is cast in Shilo, before God. This is repeated once again in the summary of the division: "These are the inheritances which Elazar, the kohen, and Yehoshua bin-Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided by lot at Shilo before God, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting" (Ibid. 19:51). This emphasis takes us back to the second Israelite casting of lots, which we have already discussed (that performed on the Day of Atonement), where the same emphasis occurs: "He shall take the two goats and stand them before God at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And Aharon shall place lots upon the two goats... and the goat whose lot is for Azazel shall remain alive before God, to atone for him" (Vayikra 16:7-10). Once again we encounter the place where the casting of lots takes place – "Before God". These verses describe this as an act in its own right: first, Aharon takes the goats and stands them before God, then he casts lots. The placing of the goats "before God" is a necessary preparation for the casting of lots. The casting of lots for the inheritance of the land, then, is performed "before God" in Shilo, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and the lot of the goats on the Day of Atonement is cast "before God" at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.[27]

This expression ("before God") is a clear, sharp antithesis to the lot of Haman which we find in Esther. Concerning that lot we read: "... he cast the pur which is the lot, before Haman, from day to day and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar" (3:7). This lot is cast "before Haman" – apparently indicating not just the geographical place where it takes place, but also testifying to the psychological, ideological orientation of the person performing it. Just as the fundamental assumption in Haman's casting of the lot is one of absolute, fixed determinism, with which one cannot argue and against which one has no appeal, so the lots of Israel give expression to an absolute supreme world which is determined for all of eternity. But one lot is cast "before Haman," while the other is cast "before God." This difference brings in its wake either feasting or fasting, either inebriation and immorality or repentance and atonement. Haman sees himself as controlling the forces of nature that act upon the character of different times. The magician who cast the lot does so "before Haman." In contrast, the High Priest

and Yehoshua stand and cast lots before God; it is He Who is responsible for the absolute, eternal determining.

Two lots, and two world-views. Two absolute worlds that confront man with an absolute truth that imposes itself upon him. But one is imposed through earthly (or pagan divine) laws that have no interest in who stands before them; the other is imposed by the Supreme King of kings, who determined the results of the lot in accordance with moral considerations; adapted to the person who stands before Him.

While a superficial reading of Esther may suggest that it is a profane tale, with the casting of the lot representing a minor event of little significance, it turns out that a war of cultures is concealed behind the manner in which the day of the decree is determined, and it is indeed proper that the festival be named specifically after the lot of Haman, which is overturned by God. We shall hopefully return to this clash of cultures in the coming shiurim when we discuss the multiplicity of parties in Esther and the fast decreed by Mordekhai and Esther upon their generation.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1]As to the somewhat opaque explanation in the text – "It was disdainful in his eyes to lay his hand upon Mordekhai alone," see T. K. Beal, *Esther*, Brit Olam, Minnesota 1999, p. 48.

[2]Paton maintains that by means of the lot Haman wanted to establish the date when he would come to the king to seek the annihilation of the Jews (Paton, pp. 200-202). It is interesting that the date for the slaughter of the Jews fell on the 13th day (of Adar), and the dispatch of the letters to that effect also took place on the 13th day (of Nissan.)

[3]See further in Bardtke, p. 243-244 (likewise maintaining that the verse belongs where it is.)

[4]See, for example: Paton, pp. 54-57.

[5]Indeed, in the Septuagint the date (13th of Adar) is inserted into the description of the casting of the lot, too.

[6]The hypothesis that follows is based upon my article, "Feasting and Fasting in Esther," in *Hadassa Hi Esther*, pp. 73-92.

[7]See Beal, p. 49

[8]For further elaboration, see: H. Tadmor, "Rosh Ha-shana," *Biblical Encyclopedia*, vol. VII, Jerusalem 5750 (3), pp. 306-311. Concerning the lot in this environment, see: W. W. Hallo, "The First Purim," *BA* 46 (1983) 19–26.

[9]This is noted by Y. Klein and M. Tzipor, *Esther*, *Olam Ha-Tanakh*, p. 242. Similarly – M. Margalio, "The Hidden Battle Between the God of Israel and Haman," *Beit Mikra* 93 (5746), p 296, note 14a.

[10]See Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot ha-Emuna Ha-Yisraelit*, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv 5720; vol. IV, pp. 445-446.

[11]HAL, vol. 4, pp. 1794-1796

[12]The source of the word *pur* is to be found in the Accadean (*pūru*) and in the Assyrian (*BUR*). In these languages the word means a "bowl" (seemingly, a bowl of stone). Into this bowl dice would apparently be thrown, and these would indicate the direction of fate. (In Accadean and Assyrian this word was also already used in the sense of fate.) While the manner of divining in a wine goblet was different - focusing instead on the forms created

by the wine in the goblet (somewhat like coffee runes in our times), Haman's bowl is still reminiscent of Yosef's goblet.

" [13]Any divining that is not like [that of] Eliezer, Avraham's servant, or like [that of] Yonatan, son of Shaul, is not [properly called] divining" (Chullin 95b.)

[14]P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, AB, New York 1980, p. 326

[15]Concerning the definition of this narrative as an exile narrative see: W. L. Humphreys, "A Life-style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973) 211–23; A. Meinhold, *Das Buch Esther*, ZBAT, Zurich 1983, pp. 14-17; Fox, 145-148. One of the answers provided by the Gemara as to the question of why Hallel is not recited over the salvation that took place on Purim, although we recite Hallel over the Exodus from Egypt (on Pesach), is as follows: "Rava said, It is okay there (Exodus) 'The servants (avdei) of God shall praise' and not the slaves (avdei) of Pharaoh, but here 'The servants of God shall praise' and not the servants of Achashverosh?! We were still servants to Acheshverosh!"

[16]The Targum of the Megilla actually starts with a dream experienced by Mordekhai, and its interpretation is the actual course of events described in Esther.

[17]Perhaps this is what is hinted at in the following Midrash Chazal: "Since Shaul was king, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: The descendant of Amalek shall fall by the hand of a descendant of Rachel. Thus we find that in Refidim, he [Amalek] fell by the hand of Yehoshua, as it is written: 'Yehoshua weakened Amalek.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said: This tribe will always be ready to exact revenge on Amalek." (Pesikta Rabbati, Ish Shalom edition, parasha 13.)

[18]The question of whether the festivals of the month of Tishrei should be regarded as biblically ordained new year celebrations, is a complicated one; there is on-going debate among the scholars in this regard. For a review of the subject, see: H. L. Bosman, "Rosh ha-Shana," *NIDOTTE*, vol. 3, p. 1022-1023. To my mind, the very fact that Sukkot is referred to in the text as a festival that falls "at the period of the year" (Shemot 34:22) or "as the year ends" (Shemot 23:16) indicates that the month of Tishrei, too – like the month of Nissan – is perceived as a "beginning of the year". Ibn Ezra mentions this explicitly in his commentary on Vayikra 25:9; see also Rabbi Y. bin-Nun, "Rosh ha-Shana or the Beginning of the Year?" in *Be-Rosh ha-Shana Yikatevun*," *Alon Shevut* 5763, pp. 11-19.

[19]Rabbi Y. Bin-Nun expands on this in "The Scroll of Reversal," *Hadassa Hi Esther*, *Alon Shvut*, 1997, 47-54.

[20]This comparison is already hinted at in the *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 21, 57b.

[21]S. Shuv maintains that the entire plot of Esther is built around the Persian new year customs ("Megillat Esther – Megilla Shel Karnaval," *Mehkarei Hag* 2 (5750)), pp. 31-43). She focuses on the way in which the story and the Purim celebrations are molded, while ignoring the substantial and significant comparison between the two "new years". Purim is not an attempt to adopt the Persian celebration; on the contrary, it seeks to emphasize the contrast between this Persian festival – whose results we encounter in the form of Haman's decree – and the Israelite New Year celebration. For further discussion of the relationship between the Israelite New Year and the Babylonian one, see M.D. Cassuto, "Biblical Literature and Canaanite Literature," vol. II, *Jerusalem* 5739, p. 9, note 2.

[22]Mishna, *Yoma* 3:8. According to the view of the Sages (*Yoma* 36b) the kohen said, "I have sinned (chatati)" prior to the words "I have transgressed (aviti) and performed iniquity (pashati)".

[23]Concerning the lot as reflecting a deterministic approach, in contrast to Divine freedom, see: J. Rosenheim, "Fate and Freedom in the Scroll of Esther," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992), pp. 149-125.

[24]It should be emphasized that the general impression that arises from Tanakh is that there is indeed some real value to the world of divination and lots, and that one can, in reality, make use of it – except that it is forbidden to do so. This sense is supported by the examples quoted above: the divinations of Lavan, of the servant of Avraham, and of Yonatan, Shaul's son, as well as Shaul's consultation of the medium, etc. To these we may add, for example, the lots cast by the sailors on the ship commissioned by Yona, in order to determine "because of whom this evil has come upon us." And indeed, "The lot fell upon Yona" (Yona 1:7). Against this background we may understand the Divine demand set out in the Torah (Devarim 18:13), "You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God" – as an alternative to knowing the future in the ways practiced by the other nations – through the "diviner, or soothsayer, or enchanter, or witch, or charmer, or medium, or wizard, or necromancer" that are listed just prior to this commandment (Ibid. 11-12). This is in accordance with the view of Ramban, set out (ad loc) in his commentary. However, see Ibn Ezra's commentary on Vayikra 19:31. The medieval commentators were divided on this issue.

[25]The command appears once again, later on, in similar language: "You shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families. To the more numerous you shall give a greater inheritance, and to the fewer you shall give a smaller inheritance; every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falls; according to the tribes of your fathers shall you inherit"(33:54.)

[26]This is the principle as it arises from the context of the daughters of Tzelofchad. The Oral Law, however, limits the application of the principle to the generation of the desert: "'This is the matter' – This matter shall be applicable only for this generation" (Bava Batra 120a.)

[27] Concerning the emphasis on the lot being cast "before God," see W. Dommershausen, "Goral," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. II, p. 452.