

As everyone should know by now, given the wide publicity that the Harvonah Memorial Foundation has given to this issue on the web ([www.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubey.org](http://www.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubey.org)), on Facebook (Remember Harvonah), and on Twitter (@Harvonah), the great Harvonah is the best and most memorable of all of the eunuchs in the Megilah. He stands out even in this Biblical book that is so filled with eunuchs that it's amazing anyone was ever born in Shushan. As we know from the hallowed hymn *Shoshanat Ya'akov*, Harvonah is the only one of these eunuchs said to be "*zachur la-tov*," "remembered for good." But despite our years of labor here at the Harvonah Memorial Foundation, and despite the wide acclaim we have achieved for Harvonah among the faithful, there are always new fields of Harvonah knowledge to open up to the scrutiny and deep examination that heretofore has only been equaled by the interest shown by the IRS in our Foundation's bookkeeping. We are so pleased that due to new funding whose source we cannot reveal under court order, we are this year for the first time able to enter previously unplumbed depths of Harvonah. With gratitude to our unnamed funders – did I mention that we're under court order? – we plunge into these deep waters to revel in the sea of knowledge that they contain, knowledge only available to us because of the unwavering commitment that the Harvonah Memorial Foundation has shown over its many – I'm not at liberty to say just how many, but rest assured that it is, indeed, many – years of its existence. For details on the Foundation's operations and a current financial statement, you can always refer to our website, where these materials are conveniently made available in both the usual Hittite and Samarian as well as, new this year, ancient Nubian.

This year for our Harvonah Memorial Lecture, we will focus on the important area of Chapter 4. What's that you say? Harvonah does not appear in Chapter 4? Well, my friends, these are precisely the misunderstandings that the Harvonah Memorial Foundation was founded to correct! The shocking episode of Mordechai and his very poor fashion choices narrated in Chapter 4 contains, of course, extremely important clues about Harvonah's identity and character, as we will show presently. We want to thank the research facilities of McMenamin's and Goat Hollow for their assistance in getting us in the right frame of mind to secure the original manuscripts of the relevant tractate of the Talmud, Masechet Afnah, and our lecture this year comes from the text and commentaries on page 27a:

"Rabbi Hatich said: When Mordechai dons sackcloth and ashes, why does Esther send him clothing? Does Esther really know the latest fashion trends? How could that be, when she herself had to take advice on how to dress, as it is written, 'When the turn came for Esther to go to the king... she did not ask for anything but what... the king's eunuch advised' [Esther 2:15]. Clearly, Esther took advice from the eunuchs on these matters, as it is written, 'When Esther's maidens and eunuchs came to inform her [about Mordechai's terrible fashion sense]...' [Esther 4:4]. And who would know about such things among the eunuchs? Only Harvonah. Do not read his name Harvonah but rather *ha-rav onah* – the Master of the Season. Learn from this that Harvonah was the eunuch with the greatest knowledge of what was in fashion each season and the chief advisor on this matter to Esther."

Rashi takes issue with Rabbi Hatich's explanation of Harvonah's name, having previously explained the name in four different ways himself in four different places, mostly by helpfully translating it into medieval French [see the archives on our website for the previous Harvonah Memorial Lectures covering this topic]. But since even Rashi doesn't really want to contradict a rabbi of the Talmud, as much fun as that would be, he instead explains that

the word *onah* – Season – here refers not to fashion at all but instead to the weather. It was a particularly cold year, and as everyone knows, sackcloth and ashes are not exactly appropriate for the chill. Esther was thus concerned for Mordechai's health, though the fact that Mordechai also looked terrible in sackcloth – he was really more of a Summer – was certainly a factor in Esther's concern.

Tosafot, the great medieval commentators, try to harmonize Rashi with the Talmud by arguing that there is an essential connection between good fashion and appropriate clothes for the weather, a position that they support with 14 other references from different parts of the Talmud that are about boats, talking donkeys, splattering blood on the altar, falling down a well, and finding an appropriate messenger to deliver a *get*. When none of this works, they use gematria to show that the word "fashion" and the word "weather" have exactly the same numerical value, as long as you spell them completely wrong and can't add.

Modern commentators speculate that the medieval commentators were misled by their lack of familiarity with fashion, something they shared spectacularly with Mordechai and with the ancient rabbis, who really needed to get out more. As everyone knows, science has shown that there is an inverse relationship between fashion and practicality, so that it was really Mordechai's scientific nature that made him look so bad.

"Rabbi Tofer said to Rabbi Sichah: If what Rabbi Hatich says is true, why didn't Harvonah give appropriate clothing to Mordechai immediately when he saw his poor fashion choices? Said Rabbi Sichah: It's obvious! Harvonah was loath to undermine Esther's authority by taking direct action, as it is said, 'and she commanded him concerning Mordechai' [Esther 4:5]. Despite Harvonah's expertise, he could do nothing without Esther's command."

Rashi quotes the Midrash, which relates four stories of servants not knowing their places with disastrous results. He particularly mentions Elisha's servant Gehazi, who really knew how to mess things up [see II Kings 5:20]. Instead, just as we see ourselves constantly as servants of the King of Kings, so too should servants of earthly kings and queens follow their commands without question, as long as the commands are reasonable, just, and don't require going against any law of the Torah or teaching of the sages or good advice of your grandmother. Which pretty much rules everything out.

Tosafot provide 27 different medieval proverbs to the effect that royalty who allow their servants to act like their masters are cursed with infertility, or perhaps drought. They also report that the Talmud also has 6 references that argue the other side of this point, and they spend the next 3 pages trying to harmonize these, just for fun. When they fail, they blame Rashi.

"Rabbi Zolel said: Wait a minute! Doesn't it clearly say in the Megilah that the eunuch who went to speak to Mordechai is named Hatach, NOT Harvonah? Doesn't that mean this whole conversation is completely moot? Rabbi Hatich responded to Rabbi Zolel: Even though I died two hundred years before you were born, I'm going to take you on! Rabbi Shikor said in the name of Rav Amur M'Rosh or some say it was in the name of Rabbi Sichah and some say it was someone else but never mind: Hatach clearly means 'one who beats the drum.' Harvonah was the only eunuch

known to be a drummer, as it is written, 'Harvonah said, "*Hinei etz...* Here is a stick...', clearly referring to a drumstick. So Hatach was none other than Harvonah, the best of eunuchs, who was the only one qualified to speak in the queen's name. QED."

The Vilna Gaon was puzzled by this passage, as was the Vilna Ga-un, the Vilna Ma-fun, and the Wilma Flin-stone. None of them could understand how a drummer could be entrusted with anything as important as speaking with the queen and her uncle – or cousin, or husband, or whatever Mordechai was to Esther. Unbeknownst to them, the Ramban had already explained the passage connecting Harvonah with the stick as a mystical, metaphorical reference to Noah, who built the ark with wood, had a hard time handling a ridiculous number of animals, and finally got drunk on his own wine. For Ramban, Harvonah resembles Noah in that both of them form a channel that was life-giving: Noah for the animals to cross over the waters of the Flood, and Harvonah for Esther to pass appropriate clothing over to Mordechai, thus saving him from a fashion disaster as bad as the waters of the Flood.

The experts at the Harvonah Memorial Foundation recommend that all who want to view themselves as righteous should follow Harvonah's example by calling the fashion police at every opportunity when confronted by someone wearing hideously out of style clothes, hitting everything you can reach with a stick, and bowing down to people in authority just long enough to get them to do what you want. Thus will we merit the coming of Moshiach, may it come speedily in our days, Amen, Selah.

This concludes the Harvonah Memorial Lecture for this year. Please always remember and never forget to donate generously to the Harvonah Memorial Foundation to continue its support of this lecture series. Note that many halachic authorities (only 99% of whom are paid advisors for the Harvonah Memorial Foundation) argue that this support constitutes *matanot la'evyonim* – the mitzvah of giving gifts to those in need that is mandated on Purim. As a friendly reminder, you can find the Foundation and donate on the web at:  
[www.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubey.org](http://www.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubey.org)

Hag Sameah!