

Dear friends of the Harvonah Memorial Foundation, since you have been diligently attending this lecture series for so many, many years – please don't ask us how many; we're not at liberty to say for tax reasons; we're sure you understand – you have already learned so very, very much about the blessed Harvonah, may he always be remembered for good. You have seen the many, many, many ways in which his goodness is demonstrated throughout the Megillah, and moreover, you have followed along, breathless with anticipation, as we showed that Harvonah's amazingness has its roots in the sublime words of the Torah, that its branches spread like weeds throughout the books of the Tanach, that its leaves unfurl willy-nilly in the pages of the Mishnah and Talmud, and that its flowers – well, if we may say so ourselves, its flowers blossom like noxious vines through the research of the sage scholars right here at Harvonah Memorial Foundation headquarters, whose exact location we cannot reveal but it's safe to say that you can find us wherever the spirit of Harvonah lingers – or any spirits, really; we'll drink anything.

But one question, one burning question, one crucial and somehow-until-this-year-always-neglected question – did we say that this is an important question? – has never before been proposed, yet alone asked, yet alone answered, yet alone... well, you get the idea. Until this year!!! Yes, friends, you are privileged to have front-row seats at the revelation of the choicest piece of Harvonah research to have come out of our Foundation since... well, since... was it really only last Purim? Anyway, we are ready to unveil this epitome of ultimate questions – did we say it was a good question? – to you today. What is it? Well, not more or less than this: We accept that Harvonah should always be remembered for good. But riddle us this: How did Harvonah become the most revered of eunuchs (which is really saying something)? After much research, mostly conducted under the influence of the last third of Earth, Bread, and Brew, we have not only a question but also, blessedly, an answer: The only way that Harvonah was able to become the progenitor of all eunuchs – metaphorically, of course – was by besting all of the other eunuchs in what is called in the Talmud "ha-demokratus" – usually translated as a flawed, somewhat corrupt, and usually misguided exercise to select one winner from among a group of barely distinguishable candidates. Some may think that this exercise bears some resemblance to what we know as an "election," but nothing could be further from the truth! To prove it, we will present this year the incontrovertible evidence found in the original manuscripts of a heretofore and perhaps deservedly overlooked tractate of the Talmud known as *Masechet Ha-B'chirah*, and our lecture this year comes from the text and commentaries on page 57a:

"It is taught in the name of Rav Ein B'reirah who learned it from Rabbi Lo Ichpat Li from the east: Harvonah was selected as the most worthy eunuch by a majority of the eunuchs in Shushan. But it is taught in the name of Rabbi Bocher from the west that Harvonah only received a plurality of the votes of the eunuchs. *Kashya!* – literally, a multi-grain cereal, but here meaning, "Gotcha!" All were perplexed until Rav Botnim from the south came and explained it to them: Harvonah would have received a majority of the votes had all votes been counted, but a large number of eunuchs had no identification and were thus turned away by Persian poll workers."

Rashi goes into a long disquisition on what the word "vote" could possibly mean, since clearly the eunuchs could never have been eligible to vote in the first place, not being heads of households or landowners or, by some definitions, men. He concludes that instead of "vote" we should read "leek" – the eunuchs gave leeks to their favorite eunuch, and the one with the most leeks made a quiche (that's "quiche" in Old French) for the rest and thus took

power. He comments that this is how all leaders should be chosen, especially in France.

Tosafot, the great medieval commentators, focus on the fact that these three rabbis are coming from the east, the west, and the south, but NOT from the north! What could this mean?? Tosafot mean to find out, and they scour all of the tractates of the Talmud for stories in which the north is omitted. Surprisingly, they find that this happens 65 other times in the Talmud. Perplexed, they look at the gematria and find that 65 is equivalent to Hallel, of course referring to the songs of praise sung on all of the other holidays, but NOT on Purim! Aha! Excited, they conclude that the true way to choose a leader among the eunuchs was to hold a singing competition, and the best singer won and was rewarded with recording contracts and a quick descent into obsolescence. This was of course called "Avodah Zarah Parsit" or "Persian Idolatry," which explains why a Jew never won.

Modern commentators find the idea of identification among eunuchs intriguing, and they lay out all of the ways of identifying oneself among ancient cultures of the Near East, only to find that none of them were possible among the eunuchs of Persia, requiring, as they say, unavailable parts. As a result, they conclude that the only way that Harvonah could have emerged a winner was to get everyone else so confused about who they were that they voted for him thinking he was them. They call this the "Hillel Principle" and then knock off early for lunch.

"Rabbi Balbel said: *P'shita!* – literally, a squishy form of bread, but here meaning 'duh!' Harvonah didn't need to be chosen by the other eunuchs, for he had already been chosen by the Blessed Holy One, and the sign of it is in his name: Har Vo Nah, meaning 'Come to the mountain, please!' Like Moshe Rabeinu, the Holy One signaled the selection of Harvonah by calling him to a mountain and delivering unto him Ten Commandments."

Rashi asks, what were these Ten Commandments? He finds a midrashic answer from an otherwise unknown rabbi named Joe, who says they are: 1. Obey me! 2. Don't obey anyone else! 3. Don't watch Persian Idol! 4. Dress nice one day a week. 5. Honor me! 6. Don't do bad stuff. 7. Not applicable. 8. Get a job! 9. Don't lie to me, young man! 10. You get what you get and you don't get upset. Rashi, however, dismisses all of these and decides that the Ten Commandments were really the original Ten Commandments, which needed to be given again since no one was really paying attention the first time.

Tosafot argue among themselves about which mountain is being referred to here. They decide it must be Mt. Ararat and spend the rest of their time arguing about who Noah's sons could possibly have married.

Modern commentators conclude that the text has been corrupted. The original Rabbi Balbel teaching was about Moshe Rabeinu in the first place, but it got confused with Harvonah through a clerical error in the 15th century. As a result, they are able to wipe out centuries of commentators' efforts to reconcile the text with the rest of the Talmud in just a few minutes and are able to get back to what they love most: attacking each other.

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The experts at the Harvonah Memorial Foundation recommend that all who want to view themselves as righteous should follow Harvonah's example by identifying all of your supporters and having them vote early and often, looking for the one whom the Holy One has blessed (just a hint: they'll let you know), and writing your own campaign rules. 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 have at one time or another been 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.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubeyoube.org

Hag Sameah!