

As you should well know by now (if you'd been listening), the Harvonah Memorial Foundation is a group of scholars and sages (and some thymes and basils) who have devoted themselves to the study of the greatest eunuch (and that's saying something) ever to walk the earth, the inimitable (and believe us, we've tried) Harvonah, whom even the ancient rabbis acknowledged should always be "remembered for good" (Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 7b). But it has come to our attention that there are some scoffers out there in the world who doubt the extent of the influence of Harvonah on the course of history. "Was he not a eunuch?" they cry. "Were not his actions limited to a few passages in the Megillah?" they cry. "Was he not a minor character, after all?" they cry. And frankly, that makes us cry. It is as obvious to us as the sun in the sky (well, ok, today is a bit cloudy) that Harvonah's influence extends far beyond the Megillah itself, that the Torah of Harvonah is as vast and as endless as, well, the Torah itself (as it were). And we always prayed (when we could remember) and hoped (when it was convenient) and believed (in our better moments) that our faith in the greatness of Harvonah (he was rather portly) would be accepted by the masses, at least after a massive PR campaign, as our consultants promised us (lately, they won't return our calls). But now we see that despite our devotion to Harvonah (we don't get out much) and our many hours of painstaking research (at the bar), the masses are not coming around (not even with free drinks)! They persist in ignoring Harvonah, which really gets on our nerves (when we're conscious). After much consultation among the leaders of the Foundation (at least three bottles-worth), it has been decided that the time has come to reveal incontrovertible evidence based on cold, hard facts that Harvonah is more than just a eunuch, more than just a plot point in the Megillah, but actually a trace of the presence of the Holy Blessed One in the world!

On what do we base this ambitious (and frankly overblown) assertion, you may ask? (Come on, please ask!) On the most scientific of sciences, the most factual of facts, and the most objective of all objectivities, the wholly holy practice of...gematria, of course! Yes, we know it's exciting; settle down there in the back. You probably never gave it a second (or first) thought, but we at the Harvonah Memorial Foundation have long known that the numerical value of the holy name of Harvonah is 271. Now we can reveal to you the mystical connection that identifies Harvonah with another important figure in the sea of Torah: *Ha-Ish*, the mysterious man whom Joseph encounters when trying to find his brothers [Genesis 37:15-17]. But don't take our word for it. We, here and now (because we'll forget later), present to you the iron-clad evidence, found in the newly unearthed (watch out for the dirt) Talmudic tractate "*Mi Hu Zeh*," which is exclusively concerned with the hidden identities found in the Megillah. Our study begins on page 23b:

"Rabbi Zehut taught: From where do we know that Harvonah is the same as *Ha-Ish* ['the man'] who spoke with Joseph? From [the value of] their names, of course. Rav Eino-hu replied: *Ini?! [literally, the beginning of an Aramaic nursery rhyme, but here meaning 'are you a complete idiot?!']* All the world knows that the value of Harvonah is 271 [see??], but the value of *Ha-Ish* ['the man'] is 316! Rav Heshbon came [some manuscripts read 'from the bar'] and solved the problem for them: Just as Hillel taught that we add and do not subtract from holiness [Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 21b], so too do we add and not subtract in order to arrive at holiness. [For those who failed math in third grade: If we add up the digits of Harvonah,  $2+7+1=10$ ; if we add up the digits of *Ha-Ish*  $3+1+6=10$ ]. Whatever applies to Harvonah applies to *Ha-Ish*, and whatever applies to *Ha-Ish* applies to Harvonah. Just as *Ha-Ish* ['the man'] is identified with an angel [B'reishit Rabbah 84:14], so too is Harvonah a messenger from the Holy Blessed One."

Rashi gets very excited about the numerical connections between the Megillah and the Torah, and he spends a lot of time working out the gematria of the words "Megillah" and "Torah." When he discovers that Torah = 611 and Megillah = 88, and then follows the Talmud by adding together the digits and finds that Torah = 8 and Megillah = 16, he almost plotzes. Clearly, each of the five books of the Torah represents two chapters of the Megillah! This idea creates so much interpretive work to do that Rashi's mind boggles, and he has to go lie down in the vineyards for a while to calm down. When he returns, smelling only mildly of cabernet, he goes into a long soliloquy about how Purim and Yom Kippurim are really the same and then ends up snoring quietly in the corner while his grandkids tiptoe around, murmuring that maybe zaide is a little past his prime.

Tosafot, the great medieval commentators, just love these kinds of connections between otherwise completely separate texts because, well, that's their bread and butter! They quickly start connecting the dots, using Rav Heshbon's soul-expanding method, which they call *nefesh ha-Heshbon*. They find that Vashti [716=14] is equal to Abraham [248=14], which teaches us that Vashti did not leave the palace simply on a whim; God spoke to Vashti to tell her to leave Shushan, her native place, and go to a land that God would show her [cf. Genesis 12:1-13 as interpreted by Debbie Friedman z"l]. Then they find that Ahashverosh [821=11] is equal to Jacob [182=11], which teaches us that the King also fathered twelve sons and an indeterminate number of daughters and had a puzzling fondness for sheep [cf. Genesis 29-30 and 35]. Then they find that Esther [661=13] is equal to Rachel [238=13], which teaches us that Esther also had a previously unknown older sister who had weak eyes and bad taste in men [cf. Genesis 29]. When they find that Mordechai [274=13] is equal to Joshua [391=13], they lose hold of themselves completely and start spouting off uncontrollably about Mordechai's prophetic powers and his marriage to an "innkeeper" until they have to be given [another] stiff drink and sent to sit in a dark room for an hour, or, in Aramaic, 200 years.

Modern commentators note that the logical extension of Rav Heshbon's method would be to keep adding until you reduce every name to a single digit, and they then do so with the aid of an extremely elaborate computer program created especially for this purpose. When someone inconveniently notices that this really changes almost nothing about the conclusions of either the Talmud or the other commentators, they take them into a back room and tell everyone they've gone on sabbatical. Now left in peace, they write long papers and even longer books espousing their "completely new theory," and they give it an extremely long German name that no one can understand so that no one will understand. While this still doesn't get them tenure – because, let's face it, no one gets tenure anymore – it does get them their own Wikipedia page, and they figure that they'll have to settle for that.

"Rabbi Ein Sechel responded: *P'shita!* [literally, an extremely swift animal, but here meaning 'that is the dumbest thing I've ever heard!'] It was not necessary to use gematria to connect Harvonah and *Ha-Ish* ['the man']. We learn it from a *gezerah shava* [literally, a very sharp razor, but here meaning 'an argument made by connecting random words']. It says here, 'Harvonah said...' [Esther 7:9] and it says there, 'The man said...' [Genesis 37:17]. Rav Nafshi Reik added: If we did not learn it from a *gezerah shava*, it would still be *mu'van m'eilav* [literally, derived from an

olive, but here meaning 'even an idiot could figure it out']. Just as Harvonah offers the King a solution to a pressing problem at just the right time, so too does the man offer Joseph a solution to a pressing problem at just the right time. And just as the man reveals God's otherwise hidden hand moving the story of the patriarchs toward its just conclusion, so too does Harvonah reveal God's otherwise hidden hand moving the story of their descendants toward its just conclusion."

Rashi wakes up and comments that he never really liked the *gezerah shava* because only the sages could create one and that's just not fair, the meanies. But he is cheered up by the idea of connecting disparate events in the Bible to each other through the use of the word "said," since this is really the most common word in the whole thing, and he has a merry old time cataloging every instance of the word and who says it, concluding that it just may have something to do with communication [*perte de temps* in Old French]. He also loves the idea of "God's hidden hand" and opines that the world could certainly use a little more of that at the moment, hint hint, hint hint, Crusades, cough, cough.

Tosafot, as usual, focus on something completely irrelevant to the passage but very exciting to them, which is the phrase *mu'van m'eilav*, and they put on their boots for a long trek through the Talmud, finding all of the things that the ancient rabbis said were really obvious and arguing that they're either not really obvious at all or that they mean something completely different from what they say. For if the Talmud were obvious, they say, who would need us? And clearly, everyone needs us, so the Talmud is obviously an opaque mess, *ka mashma lan* [literally, go mow my lawn, but here meaning "so there!"].

Modern commentators are struck that both Harvonah and 'the man' are said to move things toward their "just" conclusions, considering that, with 'the man's' help, Joseph ends up enslaved and then imprisoned in Egypt, while, with Harvonah's help, tens of thousands of people are killed by marauding bands of Jews. They then go into a long disquisition about the relative nature of justice across time and culture, and they end up concluding that anything is really justifiable if it makes a good enough story.

The experts at the Harvonah Memorial Foundation recommend that all who want to view themselves as righteous should follow Harvonah's heroic example by doing a lot of math, answering questions before they're asked, and asking God to keep God's hidden hand to God's self, resulting in (we hope) a large (figurative) reward (but we'll take cash or check). Thus will we merit the time 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.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubelike.org](http://www.withoutharvonahwherewouldyoubelike.org)

Hag Sameah!