

Shabbos, Purim, and Beyond

A Journey Through Havdala into the Heart of Geula

What if, one week, everyone collectively decided that Shabbos was too precious to conclude? The notion of making Havdala, which is the process of parting with such a special day, could feel almost unimaginable. How could we possibly say goodbye to this day that holds such significance?

Mordechai wanted to establish Purim as a permanent Yom Tov for Klal Yisrael, but his proposal was not accepted. This decision may seem puzzling. Just as we celebrate Pesach, commemorating our deliverance from imminent extinction in Egypt, shouldn't we similarly honor Purim as a Yom Tov? After all, it marks our salvation from Haman's scheme to annihilate us.

Rav Hutner provides a compelling explanation. He suggests that had Purim been established as a Yom Tov, it would necessitate the recitation of Havdala at its end. However, the notion of doing so is inconceivable—we simply would not be able to bring ourselves to formally conclude such a significant day. This, according to Rav Hutner, is the reason Purim was not designated as a Yom Tov.

Although we do not make Havdala on Purim, it's intriguing to note that Purim itself appears to be a central theme within Havdala. This connection suggests a deeper, perhaps symbolic, relationship between the end of Shabbos and the essence of Purim.

Havdala is replete with customs of mystical origin, making it a ceremony rich in spiritual significance. Our traditions identify the moments of Havdala as an especially auspicious time for Tefilla. It is during this time that we endeavor to extend the spirituality of Shabbos throughout the entire week, exporting its kedusha into our everyday lives.

In exploring this aspect further: During Havdala, we sing together 'LaYehudim Haysa Orah - For the Jews there was light, gladness, joy, and honor,' which is a pasuk taken straight from the Megillah. Additionally, we append the words 'Ken Tihyeh Lanu,' a heartfelt Tefilla, expressing the hope that, just as there was a Yeshuah for the Jewish people during Purim, we should be granted a similar Yeshuah.

We also smell Besamim during Havdala. Generally, this is explained by the fact that on Shabbos, Hashem endows us with an extra soul, a Neshama Yesera, which is withdrawn upon the conclusion of Shabbos. Chazal teach that smelling Besamim at Havdala helps us cope with the loss of this extra soul.

Interestingly, the preferred choice for Besamim is the Hadas. Esther, also known as Hadassah, is subtly noted in this choice. The Chasam Sofer elucidates^{1]} that the Hadas that we smell on Motzei Shabbos serves as a memorial to Esther, who replaced Vashti. Vashti, known for making her Jewish servants work on Shabbos, met her end on Shabbos. In contrast, on Motzei Shabbos, we remember Esther, who assumed Vashti's position. This act is a means of giving praise and thanks to HaShem for the privilege of observing Shabbos.

The next berachah in Havdala is 'Bore Meorei HaEsh,' which is recited over the fire. This berachah is significant because fire was created on Motzei Shabbos, and we acknowledge this by thanking HaShem for its creation.

The Havdala candle must comprise two wicks. The Chasam Sofer says these wicks represent Mordechai and Esther. Just like these two were a source of hope for Am Yisrael in their time, the two wicks bring light at the end of Shabbos. Their light reminds us of how Mordechai and Esther's actions brightened a difficult time for our people.

Through these elements, it becomes clear that the very essence of Havdala is deeply rooted in the Purim story.

There is a minhag that women do not drink the wine from Havdala on Motzei Shabbos. Rav Yosef Chaim

1] Drashos Purim Katan 1836; See also Toras Moshe - Tezaveh

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Sonnenfeld offers an explanation for this practice. He suggests that Jewish women have a unique role in extending the holiness of Shabbos into the weekdays. By refraining from drinking the Havdala wine, they symbolically demonstrate that they are not as separated from the sanctity of Shabbos as men might be.^{2]}

Rav Eytain Feiner writes: ‘The “holiness” of Purim is something we can carry with us into the workweek, into our daily lives as humans with careers, material needs, and yes, even the occasional large appetite. Purim enables us to perceive Hakadosh Baruch Hu while we are encircled by a facade of nature and a world of apparent coincidence — to extract the holy from the non-holy while recognizing Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s omnipresent Hand through it all.’^{3]}

What Rav Feiner highlights about Purim applies equally to every Shabbos. We must make a clear distinction between Shabbos and the rest of the week. In doing so, Purim serves as a prime example of how we can extend kedusha into our weekdays, just as we carry the kedusha of Purim throughout our year.

While some people live their week in anticipation of Shabbos, reaching a level of devotion that is certainly admirable, others embrace a year-round immersion in the spirit of Purim. To be absorbed in the essence of Purim throughout the year is to truly understand the secret of Havdalah.

When Purim falls on Motzei Shabbos, the minhag is to delay Havdalah until after the reading of Megillas Esther, even though we don’t read the Megilla immediately after Shabbos due to its status as Muktzah. The Mishna Berura offers a straightforward explanation for this: since we can still retain some of the atmosphere of Shabbos, why rush to say goodbye? However, this practice might also hint at a deeper significance.

Chazal, provide us with two seemingly contradictory insights about the coming of the Geula. They tell us that the Geula will unfold ‘Kim’a Kim’a,’ bit by bit, akin to the gradual growth of a person who matures imperceptibly over time. In this way, the full manifestation of Geula will be like a person who has grown tall and mature before our eyes. Yet, Chazal also mention that the Geula will arrive suddenly.

Rav Dessler^{4]} reconciles these views. He suggests that the gradual Geula is akin to self-perfection, where we slowly evolve until we reach a state of perfection. This process is like a small fire growing gradually into a roaring bonfire. On the other hand, the sudden Geula is the final geula by Hashem – comparable to flipping an electrical switch, where light, or ‘Ohr,’ instantly fills a room.^{5]}

On Motzei Shabbos, during Havdala, we first say ‘LaYehudim Haysa Orah’ before making the Bracha on the fire with ‘Borei Meorei HaEsh’. This sequence is significant: we must acknowledge the great ‘Ohr’ — the light celebrated in the Megillah — before blessing the physical fire. Thus, after reading the Megillah and proclaiming the ‘Ohr’ bestowed upon us, we proceed to Havdala. Here, we daven to be worthy of experiencing that transcendent light once more. Only after this reflection and tefilla is it fitting to recite ‘Borei Meorei HaEsh’.

May we be worthy to experience the day of ‘Kein Tihyeh Lanu’ — a time when the light of Purim will once again shine forth in its full glory, and we will merit the ultimate Geula.^{6]}

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2] In his introduction to Shu’t Mishnah Sachir

3] Introduction to Purim Eternal

4] Michtav M’Eliyahu Vol 5 pg. 14

5] See also Likkutei Halachos, Matana, 3

6] This essay is partially based on Sefer Magid haRakiya, Purim, Mamar 34