

The Masquerade
by Rabbi Benjamin J. Weinbach

אל תרמי בנפשך Mordecai upbraided Queen Esther for her doubt and hesitation in comprehending her responsibilities of the hour. In an angry tirade he predicted the ominous consequences of her indecisiveness. He prophesied that as a Jewess she would not escape the terrible decree of Haman in the sanctuary of the palace. The Zohar maintains that it is unthinkable that Esther who was the heroine of the Purim story and who exhibited complete mastery of her role of leadership should need such a tongue lashing for her momentary wariness and caution. He says that Esther being wed to Mordecai sent an image of herself to אחשורוש and her body was never defiled by the lascivious king. She was able to live with Mordecai as husband and wife by working this miracle. Esther wished to continue dealing in this way with the pompous monarch, but Mordecai realized that G-d will not save the Jews through the intercession of devils, images and genies. He cried אל תרמי בנפשך this is no time to dispatch images of yourself, optical illusions of reality and magical creations. You alone must defile yourself for the salvation of your people, even if our marriage is wrecked forever. Esther now understood her role and cried וכאשר אברתי אברתי

Masquerading is a favorite sport of man. People live a lifetime veiling their true character and genuine personality. The act is so superb that gradually they lose their identity and are plagued with a rash of nervous complexes and nervous anxieties. Paranoia, schizophrenia, depressions and the huge list of phobias are nothing more than a תרמי בנפשך —an exaggerated or underestimated image of ones self. All professionals caution their patients and clients that they shed their masks and reveal their inner selves. Whether it is a dominating mother, a weak father, a sibling rivalry, a childhood disappointment it is nothing more than a תרמי בנפשך, a fictitious

psychological mirage. Just as the miracle of Purim was affected by a queen suddenly restored to reality, so modern man must unmask his hypocrisy and facade and smash his artificial shell. Only by a firm resolution of אל תרמי בנפשך —will he gain inner peace.

Despite the resurgence and growth of Torah in the past thirty years on American soil, an outlandish number of our youth have found havens of fulfillment, in competing secular, cultural and even religious movements. We sit with our hands folded as the flower of our youth wilts on campuses, in business and professions and in all walks of American life. Synagogues of beauty and tradition fall like dominos under the sway of reformers, institutions of Torah must resort to strange methods of fund raising because of the paucity of donors and wondrous razor edged minds are charmed by science, medicine music and art. All this, because there is no one with the stature of Mordecai to shout— אל תרמי בנפשך —and rattle the smug rabbinical leaders to cease sending messages, alarms and warnings against defections from Torah and Judaism. These young people who search for an identity want to see live shows of commitment rather than of daredevil manifestos, or read glaring headlines of doom.

The story is told of a world renowned rosh hayeshiva famous for his sparkling חרושי תורה who fell into a depression and seemed to have lost his touch in grinding out novel and innovative expositions of the Talmud. Being a Chosid of a rebbe himself, he decided to seek a remedy for his spiritual slump, from the saintly tzadik. The rebbe asked him to open a gemoro and learn on the table. "You never learned Tosfos before Rashi as long as I know you," noted the rebbe in surprise. An expression of relief broke across the face of the rosh hayeshiva. His expertise returned, as he was convinced that this was the cause of his unlucky streak.

Yes, Purim is the holiday of ונהפוך הוא when the tables are turned and our inner beings are exposed. Perhaps this is the basis of the custom of masquerading on Purim when we

ironically mirror our year round self imprisonment. There is much we can learn yearly from reading the megillah. But nothing as important as אל תרמי בנפשך, the folly of self delusion. Masquerading on Purim will forever remain the satire of our lives.