

A Purim Story: A Cautionary (and Contagious) Tale of מדע כנגד מדע

עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע פְּרוֹדְקְשָׁנִי

Advance praise for “A Purim Story” (i.e., they haven’t read it yet)

- The laughter is truly contagious.
- Simply infectious. Would certainly wear a mask and gloves before reading, if not hazmat gear.
- Honestly I didn’t enjoy it so much. I wish it would have been eradicated.
- One of the most influenzal stories of our time!
- This story has already gone “viral.”
- You will never get sick of this, though you may get sick “from” it.
- A tale of epidemic proportions.

Prologue

There was a time long, long ago when people died of DZs. There were many different types of DZs, too numerous to count. It seemed like every few years another DZ would appear out of nowhere. Each year countless innocent people would die from them. The Seers were tasked with battling the DZs, and just as they would conquer one, another would surface on the horizon. All lived in fear of the mysterious and elusive DZs.

Then one day, the Seers developed a new weapon against the enemy- the magic touch. With a mere touch to the upper arm with a special potion, one would be immune to the enemy. At first there were those who denied the effectiveness of the magic touch, but with the passage of time, all came to hail its power.

As time passed, DZs began to wane. Gradually one by one, DZ after DZ was eradicated due to the magic touch.

BUT, just as DZs were beginning to disappear, a new movement arose. It was started by Dr. עורר שדה (possibly wake-field in English- any association or identification with any known scientists is purely ~~intentional~~ coincidental), who disseminated his new teachings. He developed a series of “oughts” that he preached, fifty in total. Below are some examples:

- You ought to let nature take it’s course and not interfere.
- You ought not use the magic touch, it will cause you harm.
- You ought to consider the magic touch a hoax perpetrated on humanity for personal gain.

- You ought to take money before you perform any research.

- You ought to persist even if your publication gets retracted and your license revoked.

He therefore decided to call his movement- “ought”ism.

Few knew his true motivation. It was not DZs that he wanted to eradicate, it was the Jews. When DZs were rampant, and people were suffering, the Jews could be blamed for the ills of society. If DZs were eradicated, there would be no reason to blame them, and they would be allowed to flourish.

There was genuine fear that “ought”ism might reverse the gains of the magic touch. Fortunately, its effects were ultimately minimal, and the magic touch continued unabated. Dr. עורר שדה eventually died, and many thought “ought”ism would die with him. Little did they know, however, that this would not be the demise of the awakened field; it would only lay dormant until it would one day wake again.

Eventually, DZs disappeared altogether. Once DZs were gone, the magic touch was no longer needed, and the recipe for the special potion was forgotten. But people no longer developed DZs and the effects were astounding. Fewer people called in sick for work; productivity rose exponentially; weddings were not cancelled because the groom contracted an infection; airplanes travelers were not afraid of being infected by fellow passengers; Jews were not afraid to go to Florida or Mexico for Pesach; Purell went out of business, and Kleenex downsized; all children were allowed to attend the chol hamoed carnivals in Wood Lake, and on and on.

And so it remained for many generations, when nary a soul would even recognize the DZs if it starred them in the face, and they had been all but forgotten...until

Chapter 1

ויהי בימי ... A new king reigned over the land of Pertus (pronounced per-tus מלרע) and Me-die (מלרע) - etymology derived from the Jamaican folk song popular prior to the dissemination of the magic touch). AchashVIRUS was his name (Vaxxes was his original Persian name).

His Queen Vaxti had been born through unique genetic manipulation. Her mother was a carrier of a mitochondrial DNA defect and underwent mitochondrial transfer to produce a daughter, whom she named Vaxti. So you see, Vaxti was formed from two women וְנִשְׁתִּי הַמֶּלֶכָה עָשְׂתָה מִנְּשִׁי נָשִׁים. But on closer examination, Achashvirus was not so delighted with the nature of her birth, וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ, וַיִּשְׁעַר לֹא-עֲשֵׂתָה מֵאֵד. .. על | אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲשֵׂתָה methods of reproduction.

[Others claim Vaxti was a product of two fathers instead of two mothers, thus explaining why Achashvirus had two fathers-in-law: וַחֲמֵתוּ בְּעֵרָה, and וַחֲמֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׂכָכָה. (See *Yerushalmi Yevamot* 4:2 for reference to the notion of shared paternity.)]

To celebrate his ascension to the throne, Achashvirus held a grand celebration with representatives from all the lands of his domain.

On the first day, his Queen Vaxti was called to come before the masses, and she dutifully mingled with all the distinguished guests. But alas, when called to return to the feast the next day, she refused. She had developed a rash and it was quite disfiguring. The King was incensed, but the Queen was persistent.

"Why should she dishonor me for such a measly rash!" the King said.

The King burst in to the Queen's chambers only to see her face and body riddled with circular protrusions. The King's physician was called immediately to attend to the Queen. After a lengthy examination he proclaimed:

"I have never seen such a rash before in my life. Could it be the return of the dreaded DZs, of which I have only read, but never seen with my own eyes? How could that be?! I thought that they were gone forever."

All the physicians of the kingdom were called to render a diagnosis, but none had ever seen this before. The physicians took samples from the lesions and sent them to all the genetics labs in the realm for analysis and (genetic) translation. There were seventy two labs in all.

There was debate however whether this translation was wise or not. If the translation were performed, some argued, it may end up in the hands of infidels and be used for nefarious purposes, perhaps for biological warfare. But the King demanded to know the cause and proclaimed,

"Tell me, tell me!"

(A professor from Philadelphia has suggested that this has led to the confusion of King Achashvirus with King Tellme II [sometimes written Ptolemy II]).

As for the results- all seventy two labs, working independently, arrived at the identical genetic translation, to the letter (ie , G, C, A and T). But the physicians were still perplexed. They could not interpret this translation, as they had not seen this pattern or series of genetic letters before.

"A veritable genetic hapax legomenon," one scientist exclaimed.

They searched the genetic archives for a similar genetic translation, but remembered that generations ago, when DZs were eradicated from the population, they were stored only in the King's laboratory. The scientists then debated whether they should destroy all the existing stores of the DZs, or to preserve them for possible future use. They made the decision by lottery, and the stores were destroyed. Is the Queen's illness similar to one of the DZs of yesteryear? We will never know. It has been lost in translation.

Chapter 2

One day an elderly servant of the king walked by the open door where the Queen was lying in. He asked for an audience with the King.

"I believe I know the ailment of which the Queen suffers. I recall my great grandfather showing me a picture of a rash that looks identical to that of your Queen. He was a physician and this was the very last case he ever treated of this condition. If my memory serves me well, it was called the Pox of diminutive status. He would sit me down and share stories of the magic touch, and how before it was used, so many good people had died of the diminutive disease."

The Queen's condition rapidly worsened and she soon succumbed to her DZ, but not before transmitting it to the guests at the feast. Though before the development of the rash, the Queen was indeed contagious on the first day of the feast, whilst she socialized with guests from across the kingdom. The guests all returned to their native lands in good health, but brought with them more than good tidings. Twas not long before DZs began to rear their ugly head again. First some of the guests contracted DZs, then it spread to others. With each passing day, exponentially more people contracted DZs. Before long, they had spread to all 127 countries of the king's realm.

MEANWHILE, potential candidates to replace Vaxti were brought to the capital city of Shi-Son (short for the longer Persian, Shigella Sonnei)

There was a Jewish man in the capital city of Shi-Son and his name was Mordechai. He stuttered like Moshe Rabbeinu and was known in all the land as Mimordechai (MiMoR for short). He descended from a long line of pharmacists going back to his great ancestor Mordechai I (knick-named Mor Dror) after whom he was named. Mor Dror mixed the ketores in the Beit HaMikdash. Back in those times, the ketores was its own form of magic touch, and was used to treat DZs (Aharon was the first to use it during the plague of Korach.) His ancestors were also instrumental in fighting Dr. עורר שדה and "ought"ism. MiMoR had been taught as a child that "ought"ism was no more. He would soon discover otherwise.

MiMoR was raising his niece Chadashah, as she had no father or mother. It's not that she had no genetic father and mother; rather, she was born through in-vitro fertilization, and her rabbi ruled that she had no halakhic father or mother. To be sure, this was not the majority opinion of the rabbis of that time.

Chadashah was a microbiologist who had worked to preserve the DZ free world her entire life. Her reputation preceded her and it was said, "There is none like Chadashah under the sun." She had also worked with the team attempting to resurrect the magic touch if ever DZs spread again. Some called her Ester, due to the Ester alcohol content she identified as a component of the magic touch. (Others called her "Tester," as she had performed numerous tests, 606 to be exact, until she identified the most likely recipe for the magic touch.) Upon hearing of the return of DZs, MiMoR and Ester resolved to resuscitate the use of the original magic touch to restore health to the land.

The fair maiden Ester was taken to the palace for the beauty contest. MiMoR instructed Ester not to divulge her origins through assisted reproduction, lest the King be reminded of Vaxti. Ester was chosen to be Achashvirosh's Queen.

One day MiMoR was strolling through the streets of the city when he happened to overhear a conversation between two men, Dengson and SIRSish. They were planning to release DZs into the water supply of the palace to kill the royal family and usurp the monarchy. MiMoR immediately informed the king of this sinister plot and it was rapidly foiled. The events were recorded in the Royal Archives of Pertus and Me-die.

Chapter 3

The King appointed a new Prime Minister known as "the man," or הַמָּן (haMan). He was actually a direct descendant of Dr. עורר שדה, and his full name was עורר הַמָּן (as his parents thought עורר שדה was "the man."). He only used his second name, הַמָּן, to disguise his origins. HaMan carefully guarded his family secret. Unbeknownst to the world, the family of Dr. עורר שדה had been quietly preaching and

perpetuating the philosophy of "ought"ism. HaMan had been weaned on this philosophy and now saw an opportunity to resurrect it and bring it to the masses. If DZs returned, the Jews would of course be blamed and he could rid the world of them once and forever.

HaMan convened a meeting of the The King's cabinet to assess the DZ situation. The cabinet was comprised primarily of political has-beens that had been personally selected by HaMan, and who were likely to sympathize with his philosophy. They were descendants of those from the pre-magic touch days, whose fame and notoriety were far greater in the past. There was Ruby from Germany (whose mother called him Rubela), there was Zeke from Africa (whom the Italian ambassador called Zikka), there was the advisor from the country of Measly (whose inhabitants were called Measles, some of German descent), and there was Ola who designed her own dress with multiple small polka dots, more on the arms than on the the body of the dress. A designer marketed her dress design with the name, "very Ola."

HaMan turned to the cabinet and said, "Our influence had spread far and wide in the past, but has waned considerably, join together with me and our names will once again be known throughout the land." There was thunderous applause. For them, this was an opportunity to regain their prestige, an opportunity not to be missed, though they knew not of HaMan's plans.

HaMan was a realist. He knew that the majority of the population had an historical memory of the concept of the magic touch. Yet, he also knew that most people had no recollection of the details of the administration of the magic touch, nor even its exact name. So he devised the following ingenious plan: He would inform the public that the way to protect themselves from DZs was through a magic incantation. He himself would personally administer the "cure" to all. They would bow before him, so he could place his hands upon their head. He would then recite a special (unintelligible) phrase, concluding with the word "immunity," which would be uttered in a loud, clear voice. According to HaMan, as soon as they heard the word "immunity," they would be protected. Soon the entire nation came to rely on the so-called "heard immunity." If all would go according to plan, DZs would continue to spread, HaMan could blame the Jews, and then eradicate them.

HaMan began to perform his ceremonies of "heard immunity," and every single person of the realm would bow before haMan for him to recite the incantation, which would be concluded with the utterance, often in unison, of the word "immunity." As soon as the word was completed, the deed was done. But MiMoR would not bow before haMan, for he knew fully well that "heard immunity" would not protect those who did not receive the magic touch. [Furthermore, the recitation of incantations is a form of idol worship, with the possible exception of snake bites according to Rambam.] HaMan was consumed with anger. If MiMoR defied him then others would follow and his master plan would unravel.

And Haman came before the King and said, "DZs continues to spread across the land despite the use of the magic incantation. I know a nation scattered throughout the land that is responsible for this plague. Allow me to eradicate them and we will again be free of DZs."

The King gave haMan his stamp of approval.

Chapter 4

MiMoR mourned upon hearing of haMan's sinister plot. Ester and MiMoR set out to devise a plan of their own. Ester would have to confront Achashvirus and haMan directly. She asked Achashvirus to invite haMan to a private party.

Meanwhile, haMan returned home and bitterly complained to his wife that MiMoR would not bow down to him to receive his "heard immunity." "What do you expect," she said, "If he is from the seed of the Jews, then he has probably won a Nobel Prize. Surely he does not believe in your incantation nonsense!" Let us build a special tree, made from the original wood which grew in the field of our leader and ancestor עורר שדה. It will be fifty amos high, one for each "ought" that he preached. When the time comes, we will hang MiMoR on this tree as a symbol that "ought"ism will reign supreme.

HaMan stared intently at his wife's face. "What are those circular blotches? He said.

"Oh nothing. I just noticed them today."

"Oh, I must be off immediately to my meeting with the King and the Queen."

And haMan arrived at the palace just in time to hear the King speaking with Ester:

"Dear Ester, what is your request?"

"There is a man who is perpetrating a fraud upon the kingdom. 'Heard immunity' is a fallacy. It will not protect the people from DZs. He hopes to use this to eradicate the Jewish nation, my nation!"

"Who is this man?" the King inquired.

"It is not 'this' man, it is 'the' man, none other than הַמֶּן!"

HaMan then threw himself at the feet of Ester: "Ester, darling, listen, I know you have some of the real magic touch, I need some NOW! My wife is infected. If I don't get it now, I will die." Ester proceeded to place her hands on haMan's head and whispered a special incantation. She then concluded with the word, said aloud, "immunity." "Let's see if your heard immunity will protect you now!"

The King then said to haMan, "You deJENNERate. Stay away from my wife. How could I have listened to you?!"

And Harvona (who would later become famous for his cure for Hepatitis C, which he named, possessively, Harvoni) said:

אסתר פרק ז

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר חֲרֻבּוֹנָה לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ גַּם הִנֵּה־הֶעֱצָ... גִּבְהַּ חֲמֻשִׁים אַמָּה

Let us hang haMan on the tree made from the wood of his ancestor and put the nail in the coffin of his failed movement, "ought"ism.

And the King replied, don't bother. HaMan will soon die of DZs. Let us rather cut this tree down as a symbol that "ought"ism is eradicated off the face of the earth.

Epilogue

And so it was, the consummate example of מדע כנגד מדע.

And MiMoR was beloved by most of his fellow Jews. But fear not, he was immune to his critics.

Order and health were restored. Ester administered the magic touch to all the inhabitants of the land. All DZs were eradicated, and all traces thereof banished. The King would no longer be known by the name AchashVIRUS, but by his original Persian name, Vaxxes (Vaxi for short). And this, you see, is the true story of the origin of Vaxi Nation.