



Shabbat Zachor: Lessons from Curling

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I have Olympic-fever. No matter what sport is on, what time of day it is on (except of course during Shabbat), I love to watch the Olympics. I love the stories of the athletes. I love rooting for the underdog. And boy do I love curling.

I'm not sure what it is about the sport of curling that "swept" me up. Four years ago, when my middle son was only a few months old, my wife would wake me up in the middle of the night while she would feed the baby. Wanting to stay awake and keep her company, I would turn on the TV and what would I find at 2am? Curling. I was amazed by its simplicity. Throw a 40+ pound stone across a sheet of ice and try to put it in the "house" as close to the "button" as possible. How hard could it be?

Sitting down to write this D'var Torah, I attempted to find some parallels between curling (or any Winter Olympic sport) to either this week's Torah portion or to the upcoming holiday of Purim. In this week's Parsha, *Tetzavah*, we are instructed to make the uniform for the *Kohen Gadol* (the High Priest). The only connection that I came up with is the pageantry of the Opening Ceremonies and the outfits that each country wears.

With Purim I was able to find a few stronger connections. The major connection is in the rooting for the underdog – clearly the Jews of Shushan were underdogs, as are most of the athletes in the Olympics. With curling I find even stranger connections. Firstly, players slide their stones into the "house". The house looks like a bullseye. Mordechai, by not bowing to Haman had a bullseye on his back. Secondly, there is the old expression "sticks (or in this case brooms) and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me". In the case of the Purim stories, words were cast out and did cause tremendous damage (there was a plot to kill the king, Mordechai spoke with the guards to save the King, Esther spoke when not called upon). Thirdly, in curling there are 10 ends (think innings, like in a baseball game). Haman had 10 sons. At last, a connection that I can run with (or slide, if I want to keep the curling references going)!

As the Purim story enters into its conclusion, Queen Esther and King Ahashverosh are talking. Ahashverosh tells Esther that no matter what her request, he will grant it. Her wish is that Haman's ten sons are hanged on the gallows.

Esther's request seems a bit weird since Haman's sons had been hanged earlier in the story. Why ask to hang them if they have already been hanged? Does Esther have short term memory loss? Many commentators suggest that Esther is referring to the hanging of Haman's sons in the future. Truth is, Haman had more than 10 sons and those that survived had descendants that are still considered part of Amalek.

Amalek is a nation that snuck up behind the Jews and killed many women and children while they were wandering in the desert. Following that episode, God commands us to wipe out Amalek (in fact this week is known as *Parshat Zachor* (remembrance) and every Jew is supposed to hear that section of the Torah read).

Amalek shows up again later in the Chumash during the time of King Saul, who is instructed to kill all of Amalek. Saul, however allows the king of Amalek to survive. The king's name is Agag – Haman is an Agagite (a descendant of Agag).

We still believe that Amalek is alive today (as descendants of Haman). Hitler is often thought of as being one of Haman's descendants.

Back to Esther's request –

In the Megillah in the section with the hanging of Haman's 10 sons, there are three letters that are written smaller than the other letters (the *taf* of *Parshandata*, the *shin* of *Parmashta* and the *zayin* of *Vizata*). There is also one letter that is written larger (*vav* in *Vizata*). By using *Gematria*, we can put those letters together and get the sixth millennium (*vav* = six) with the year 707 (*tav* = 400, *shin* = 300, *zayin* = 7), the Hebrew year of 5707 which is 1946.

In 1946 as World War Two had come to a close a group of Nazi officials were on trial in Nuremberg, Germany (trials that would be known as the Nuremberg Trials). Eleven men were sentenced to die as a result of the trial. Two hours before the sentence was to be carried out, Hermann Goering committed suicide leaving ten to die. In most military tribunals the punishment would have been death by firing squad or electric chair, but the court declared that they were to be hanged (just as Haman's ten sons were hanged).

To some this is simply a coincidence, a fancy made up connection based on fake "Bible Codes", but the connection goes one step further. On October 16, 1946 the New York Herald Tribune reported that Julius Streicher "with burning hatred in his eyes... looked down at the witnesses and shouted: 'Purim Fest 1946!'" Even Streicher, a Nazi, was able to see the similarities. (Coincidentally, October 16, 1946 was the 21st of Tishrei, Hoshana Rabba, when God's verdicts are sealed.)

So, how does this all come together? The Olympics are about spirited competition, not one man's quest to destroy an entire nation. While the athletes are trying to win the Gold, Silver and Bronze, to hang around their necks (like the Kohen Gadol with his Breastplate made up of shining stones – a Tetzaveh connection); we as spectators sit and watch in awe, rooting for the underdogs.

Curling might not be the most exciting sport, but it serves to teach us a valuable lesson. We must set our guards outside our houses, to protect what is inside – our faith, our belief that though we are small, the underdog can and will prevail.

AS A FAMILY:

Watch the closing days of the Olympic Games. Root for the underdog!

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S PARSHA ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. Why does the Parsha open with lighting of the Menorah? Doesn't that fit in better with last week's Parsha (Terumah)?
2. What types of clothing did the Kohanim have to wear?
 - a. What colors were used?
 - b. What do the colors symbolize?
3. What parts of the Kohen's outfit can we see when we look at a Sefer Torah?