

PURIM

תשפ"ד

Why do we have such simcha on Purim? There were many times in Jewish history where Jews were in grave danger and were spared. We say in the Haggadah that in every generation there are those who make designs to destroy us and Hashem constantly intervenes to save us. Right now, Hamas has a charter which writes that all Jews are their targets for killing around the world, and Hashem is saving us. So why is Purim unique?

Why is it so essential to Yiddishkeit that the Rambam writes Megillas Esther will never become cancelled in the times of Moshiach? The Maggid Mishnah explains that although all the tzoros that we were saved from in history will be forgotten in the times of Moshiach, the salvation of Purim will never be forgotten. This means we will eventually forget about the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Chmelnitzky massacres, the Nazis, Hamas – everything will fade from our memory. Except for the danger of Homon's decree and how we were saved from it. Why is it so special?

The Rambam, in his introduction to Mishneh Torah, writes that the Nevi'im and Sanhedrin commanded us to read the Megillah and celebrate Purim in order to let all future generations know that Hashem is close to Klal Yisroel and He hears our tefillos when we call out to Him in sincerity. We are celebrating the power of our tefillos.

The problem with this Rambam is that Esther didn't instruct Klal Yisroel to daven. She told them to fast. The answer is understanding what a taanis means.

The Rambam says a taanis is a time to daven and do teshuvoh because it is a time of peril. Jewish lives are in jeopardy – like in our times where Jewish soldiers are dying on the battlefield every day, and Klal Yisroel are in danger from Jew-hatred increasing around the world. The Rambam adds that if there is a time of danger and the community doesn't take it as a message to daven and do teshuvoh, and instead they treat it as a natural occurrence, they are being cruel. Because when you are in danger, this is the only way to be saved from the danger Hashem is bringing.

You maintain and increase the danger by not responding properly and doing teshuvoh.

So when Esther said to make a taanis, in essence she was calling for teshuvoh and tefilloh. Hashem is close to us and answers us when we call out to Him sincerely in tefilloh. This is the lesson that must be made a permanent part of our national consciousness.

The story of Purim has a very important historical backdrop. First there was Bavel. It rose to power suddenly – not because they were a major player on the world scene, but Hashem decided that it was the proper place for Klal Yisroel to go into golus. Hashem elevated Bavel to be a world power for a very short period. Soon it is taken over by the Persian Empire. Nevuchadnezzar thought he conquered Hashem by destroying the Beis HaMikdash and exiling and subjugating His people. But his successors were constantly worried about the nevuah which said Klal Yisroel will only be in golus for 70 years and then they will return. There was a lot of speculation about how to count these 70 years. Golus Bavel took place in a number of stages and it wasn't clear at which stage to start the countdown. Each king made his own calculation. It was important to know because if Klal Yisroel don't come back at the predicted time, it means Bavel is in charge of the world and Hashem has been conquered.

Belshazzar makes his calculation, and when it came and Klal Yisroel didn't return, he made a big feast and brought out the keilim of the Beis HaMikdash to celebrate. But there was a supernatural hand which wrote something on the wall and Belshazzar was killed that night. The Persians took over and Achashveirosh, his son-in-law, became emperor. Achashveirosh wasn't real royalty and he didn't really belong on the throne. But Belshazzar's daughter Vashti fell in love with him and he became her father's successor through her. He feels he has to establish himself as an independent ruler, and Hashem uses this insecurity to make history turn in the direction He wants.

After three years, Achashveirosh feels his rule is established and he calculates that the cheshbon of 70 years is now up. So he makes aseudoh which is debasing and vulgar to celebrate his victory over Hashem. Then he makes aseudoh for the residents of Shushan including the Jews. The Jews didn't want to insult the emperor by not showing up. They want to show they are loyal citizens! So they planned to go – knowing that Achashveirosh will make all kinds of special accommodations for their halachic needs. But all of the sudden, Mordechai said not to go. It doesn't matter that everything is technically kosher. You don't belong there! You will be celebrating the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash! Achashveirosh is celebrating his victory over Hashem because he took out the keilim of the Beis HaMikdash. It doesn't matter if the keilim lost their kedushoh. Going to such aseudoh will cause you to lose your sensitivity to kedushoh because you are participating in this corrupt culture of znus and vulgarity.

Here is where Hashem activated His hashgocho using all these people's middos and agendas. A number of things happen simultaneously.

Achashveirosh is insecure and he wants to show everyone that he is in charge of the empire and he doesn't need Vashti to give him legitimacy. So he orders her to humiliate herself in front of everyone. Vashti stands up to him and refuses. So he is confused and isn't sure what to do. Memuchon, who is Homon, has his own sholom bayis problems with Zeresh, and advises Achashveirosh to show everybody that the husband rules the home and he must kill Vashti to prove it – this way his own wife will get the message and submit to his authority. He has his own interests in mind. Also, Vashti abused all the Jewish girls serving her and Hashem needs to punish her for this as well. All these factors come together to pave the way for Esther to eventually become the queen. Anytime there is a potential churbon, Hashem simultaneously puts in place a potential for a yeshuoh. So when all these things are happening, Hashem is sowing the seeds of the eventual geuloh. Bigson and Seresh plot to kill Achashveirosh, and Mordechai happens to overhear it and saves him, and now Achashveirosh is indebted to him. It's a small, insignificant detail that will become so important later on as the story unfolds.

Homon rises to prominence and Achashveirosh gives him the signet ring and nearly absolute power. Everyone in the vast Persian empire has to bow down to him, and one Jew refuses! His hatred for Jews is in his blood – going all the way back to Agog – and he has to take revenge on all of them. Mordechai previously told Esther not to reveal her Jewish identity because he doesn't want the Jews to think they are safe from the consequences of anything they do because they have an inside ally in the palace. So no-one knows that the queen is a Jewess – including Homon. When the decree is issued, Esther asks Mordechai, what is the real reason for this calamity? What aveiroh caused this gezeirah in shomayim? Without knowing what the spiritual problem was, there is no way to correct it.

But just imagine what our reaction would be today if we were told by Mordechai that the gezeirah is all our fault because we didn't listen to him and went to the seudoh? We would deny any blame and put it all back on Mordechai! After all, he is the fanatic kanoi who is constantly stirring up trouble and refusing to go along to get along. He has jeopardized all of us by not bowing down to Homon and rousing his anger. He is causing a chillul Hashem! But the greatness of Klal Yisroel at that time was that they took responsibility for their mistake, listened to Mordechai, and realized they have to do teshuvoh.

Esther knows she needs to plead personally in front of Achashveirosh – so you would think she would make an effort to look her best. But Esther doesn't care about how she looks. She has to fast for three days along with everyone else and she is going to him pale and weak. Why doesn't she care? Because Mordechai told her that Hashem put her in the palace in the first place just to be a tool in Hashem's hands to save Klal Yisroel. If she will worry about her personal safety and not do her job to fast and daven for a yeshuoh, Hashem will replace her and He will save Klal Yisroel some other way. It has nothing to do with her.

Mordechai is explaining to us how Jewish history works, how we must respond to tzoros, and how Klal Yisroel follows their leader's guidance in what aveiros need correcting and how to do teshuvoh.

Esther approaches Achashveirosh's inner chamber and she feels abandoned by Hashem. She can't ask for what she wants up front at this time, so she asks to make a private drinking party with Achashveirosh and Homon. Hashem is busy planning what is going to happen. Homon's ego goes through the roof when he hears he is invited to an exclusive party by Esther. When he sees Mordechai still not bowing to him, he decides on the spot that he is going to kill Mordechai the next day.

That night, the king couldn't sleep. Chazal tell us this also refers to Hashem paying special attention to Klal Yisroel to see if they are still continuing their sincere teshuvoh and tefilloh or not. When He sees that they are, Hashem decides that now is the time to bring the yeshuoh and bring about Homon's immediate downfall.

The Rambam says we celebrate Purim because we recognize that Hashem runs history and sets everything up for a critical moment – will we do teshuvoh or not? If we take the opportunity at that critical point and turn things around in our spiritual level, then everything comes together. All of the little, seemingly insignificant details that

Hashem put in place in advance now become crystal clear. It isn't Achashveirosh and Homon, it isn't even Mordechai and Esther. They are all tools being used by Hashem to put Klal Yisroel in a position to come to the right conclusion and make the right decision. When we take that critical moment to turn things around and do teshuvoh, then the yeshuoh comes. There is nothing that decides our fate except our own decisions and our own madreigoh. On Purim, we celebrate the fact that we control our own destiny through our teshuvoh and our tefilloh.

How do we celebrate? By recognizing **ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר**.

Once we realize that our yeshuoh is in our own hands and we don't have to be afraid of anyone, we turn to limud Torah more intensely for how to view the world – which is the purpose of 'light'. We recognize that by wearing tefillin we represent Hashem in this world, and the non-Jews will be in awe of us.

So even though the Jews of Persia know they still have to fight and kill their enemies, they are already celebrating because they know their success is guaranteed. They are fulfilling their role as the nation of Hashem. This is the simcha of Purim – to see how Hashem manipulates events of history and puts the fate of the world in our hands. The soldiers and the weapons are just a technicality. It all boils down to teshuvoh and tefilloh and limud Torah.

This is so important that in the end of history we will forget all the tzoros we endured, but not Purim – because it shows us how all of Jewish history is being orchestrated by Hashem reacting to our madreigoh in ruchniyus.

The posuk in Hallel says a strange thing. The non-Jews will praise Hashem when He overwhelms us with chessed. Why are the non-Jews praising Hashem for His chessed to us? Because only the non-Jews know how much they planned to destroy us and how Hashem foiled all their plans. They recognize Hashem runs the world to our benefit – often without our knowing about it! But that only happens when we project that we are the nation dedicated to avodas Hashem.

The simcha of Purim is to recognize and internalize all this. The Rambam says Chazal instituted the Yom Tov of Purim to show all future generations that we control history through our teshuvoh, our tefilloh, our Torah, and our mitzvos.