Purim | Show Them the Way

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More than any other holiday, Purim is alive and adaptable, resonating deeply with the various forms the ongoing struggle of Jewish history takes and the numerous moments in which our people have had to defend their existence. On Pesach when we recite the phrase "B'chol dor vador omdim aleinu" — in every generation, they rise against us to threaten our annihilation, we immediately think of Haman, who directly and overtly planned our genocide — not under the guise of slavery as Egypt did. Our divine rescue on Purim serves as a constant reminder of the eternity of Am Yisrael.

The Hidden Hand

What makes the Purim miracle even more compelling is that it didn’t involve explicit supernatural events. Seas weren’t split, heaven didn’t meet earth, and plagues weren’t summoned. During a period in which we lived outside the land of Israel and outside the experience of prophecy, Hashem delivered us by weaving His geula through human politics and human machinations.

In particular, the heart of a supreme monarch was clearly being manipulated by the hands of its Creator. Hashem's name is absent from the text of Megillat Esther, yet He secretly and powerfully directs the fickle heart of Achashverosh.

Even in eras without overt supernatural miracles, we still trace the hand of Hashem in human events and the major shifts that shape history. It is not difficult to trace our modern settlement of Israel through the prisms of the seismic historical and political shifts of the past two centuries, when our national return gathered momentum.

Moral Dysfunction

The story of Esther is also perennial because in Shushan we faced enemies bent on our destruction as well as a value system which threatened to plunge humanity into moral disarray. The sheer hedonism of an endless 180-day party, conducted in shameful public view, with people gorging on marble beds and alabaster floors, is emblematic of a decayed and rotten culture. The Persians had accumulated extraordinary wealth through the conquest of the Babylonian empire. Instead of directing this wealth toward public welfare and building a strong empire, they used it in a self-indulgent fashion. About two decades after the miracle of Purim, Alexander the Great would tear through the Persian empire and severely diminish its power and standing.

Our battles aren’t just for our national survival. Our enemies pose moral challenges to humanity, and our struggle is to protect the moral fiber of humanity. This was true in Persia, and it is true today. It is obvious that we are currently being called upon not just to defend our land, but to defeat moral confusion in a world which has lost its identity and its ability to discern truth from falsehood.

Purim is alive and during this war over Jewish destiny and moral clarity the battle of Shushan has gained renewed urgency and resonance. We may not know exactly how to decipher the tumultuous events unfolding around us, but we know that our people are eternal, and our bond with this land cannot be broken. Additionally, though recent politics are dizzying, it is increasingly clear that Hashem is guiding history by engineering the hearts and decisions of politicians and generals.

The General Population

There is a subtler and quieter part of the Esther story that is surfacing once again in our current war. During the Shushan crisis, we faced many different enemies, and not all of them were identical. All our enemies were thwarted, and all their plans were defeated. However, some were vanquished, while others were simply *transformed*.

In the story of Esther, Haman managed to activate a broad-based coalition threatening the Jewish people. For sure, many antisemites were hardened Amalekites who had sworn to battle our people in every generation. However, most of the people who awaited the day of rage against us were not our natural enemies. Yet Haman succeeded in fomenting them to join his murderous pogrom. Were they paid off by this man of unlimited funds? Were they duped into hating a nation that attended the party alongside them but kept to themselves, drank their own wine, and were cast as culturally aloof because they dared to be different? Was this hostility stoked by the Jewish return to Israel, which had occurred a few years before the Shushan parties and always angers the general populace? These are difficult questions to answer, but it is clear that Haman and his bloodthirsty, genocidal core of murderers hated us to the core. However, a large portion of the population joined the bandwagon of hatred, aligning themselves with Haman’s murderous cause, swept up by the dark tide of ambition, fear, and twisted ideology.

However, this changed. As the tide turned in Shushan, many of these casual, fair-weather enemies of our people transformed into supporters. Mordechai’s popularity surged as he was paraded through the streets of Shushan as a national hero. Subsequently, after being appointed the king’s vizier, he walked through the streets of Shushan dressed in regal attire, cheered by the general population.

This change of heart wasn’t limited to the noble men of Shushan who hobnobbed with Mordechai in the king's palace. The Megilla reports that many of the *countrymen* became inspired by the Jews and joined our cause. They didn’t convert to Judaism, but they switched alliances, realizing they had been falsely led into Jew-hatred by a conniving murderer who didn’t have their true interests in mind.

They realized that Mordechai and his people stood for values that would improve their lives. Esther wasn’t vain and didn’t sink to the level of self-indulgence as the rest of the women. She was a woman of dignity who refused to subject herself to marinating for an entire year in oils and perfumes just to improve her body image. Upon ascending to be Queen, she convinced her husband to reduce the heavy tax burden which the countrymen had been carrying to support the revelry in Shushan. The Jews brought renewed moral spirit to the rancid culture of Shushan. Finally, the general population swung. They realized we provided light, not death and drunkenness. Hashem showed them the way.

The fact that most of the population turned their backs on Haman and his hatred, joining the Jewish cause, is evidenced by the relatively low number of casualties during the fighting. Only 75,000 people were killed across 127 provinces — about 600 per province, a relatively low number. By the time the 13th arrived and the war was waged, the majority of the population had firmly aligned themselves with the Jewish cause.

Breaking the Coalition of Hatred

It is easy, and somewhat simplistic, to cluster and group all the enemies of the State of Israel together. Many countries and groups oppose us. Obviously, those who are directly involved in violence or engage in aggressive and subversive behavior toward our people and our land must be opposed and eliminated. Yet, many who oppose us are simply trapped under oppressive regimes that do not allow them to express their support for the Jewish state. Others are ensnared by confusing cultural trends and postmodern narratives, which convince them that the world would be a more just place if the "white male occupiers," who supposedly live in Israel, are supplanted by the innocent Arab terrorists who merely seek to provide Gazans with a better life.

History teaches us not to lose hope. Our enemies will be overcome, and those who commit atrocities will, in time, be wiped off this earth by God or through His human agents. Yet humanity still holds hope. The clouds of confusion will clear, and sanity will replace lunacy. The hypnotic spell of postmodern confusion will be broken. What has happened before will happen again. Just read the story of Esther.

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