



## Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

### The Eternal Gift of Purim

Alexandra Fleksher

Shabbos -- can't live without it, right? What about the Jewish holidays? Can't imagine a winter without Chanukah, a spring without Pesach? According to *Midrash Mishlei* (2:9), in the times of *Moshiach*, all the *moadim* (holidays) will be abolished – except for Purim. As *Megillas Esther* states, “These days of Purim will never pass from the Jews and their memory will not be lost from their descendants” (9:28). Furthermore, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Megillah 1:5) states that the books of *Neviim* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings) will no longer be included in the Biblical Canon, save for *Megillas Esther*. What is the significance of this uniquely eternal holiday?

**“So raise your glass if you see G-d in hidden places;  
He’s right in front of you.”** -- Maccabeats

Any deeper look into the story of *Megillas Esther* reveals the common theme of the hidden hand of G-d. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, in *Sifsei Chaim*, offers a beautiful insight as to why one must unroll the entire Megillah at the time of the reading. This physical act enables one to see at a glance how all the events of Purim are connected, and that even the negative events led to salvation.

Yet there is a paradox within the very name of *Megillas Esther*. *Esther* comes from the word *hester*, meaning hidden, as Hashem’s direction of events in the story is **hidden** behind the scenes. On the other hand, *Megillah* is sourced in the word *megaleh*, for the Megillah **reveals** to us Hashem’s deliverance within the hiddenness of exile, as the story takes place in the midst of the Persian exile. This paradox provides a model for the Jew’s relationship with G-d in exile: finding G-d even in the realm of the obscure. Hashem does not perform open miracles when we are in exile, yet He does act for us daily - and it is our job to see how.

As we know, Hashem’s name does not appear in the Megillah. Rav Shimshon Pincus explains in his *Sichos Purim* that if His name were written explicitly, the story would be supernatural instead of natural and we would lose the specific message of Purim. Purim reveals that Hashem doesn’t only show His love for us through overt miracles like those celebrated on Pesach; rather, His love even permeates nature itself. Rav Pincus asserts that on Purim, we find this more intense love within nature. Hashem raised us over the entire world on Pesach, but on Purim, we discover Hashem in every nook and cranny of the natural world.

The balance between the natural and the supernatural, the hidden and the revealed, is also reflected in the process of drawing lots (*pur*). One may think lots are simply a matter of luck and chance; however, we see the drawing of lots in *Tanach* to be an expression of the work of Hashem, such as when *Eretz Yisrael* was divided among the tribes according to lots.

#### The Gift of Hindsight

“Judaism maintains that events which we call unreasonable and which we classify under the rubric of accident or fate, belong to a Higher Divine [design] into which man has not been initiated,” writes Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik (*Days of Deliverance*, pp. 13-14). While events might seem “unreasonable” or “accidental” at the time, we have been given the gift of retrospection which often enables us to see pattern and insight after the fact. “After G-d’s passing by, in retrospective meditation, in glancing backwards, you may begin to see G-d’s back,<sup>1</sup> or the contours of reasonableness of an event that you considered classified as absurd and unreasonable.”

Rav Friedlander takes this concept one step further to explain why Purim will never be nullified. When *Moshiach* comes, we will be gifted with the understanding that evil serves a Divine purpose, and that everything develops according to Hashem’s will. The essential nature of Purim is that within the hidden actions, and without overstepping the boundaries of nature, Hashem’s Divine plan is unfolded. This will be the theme of the Messianic days.

The *Ramchal* leaves us with a timely message along these lines:

In our current time, the actions of Hashem are not understood by us at all; they can only be seen on their surface and their true essence is hidden. Their inner essence is all the same: they are all purely good and not at all bad, and this is certainly not clear or understandable now. In Messianic times, this will be at least visible and graspable: how all of the roundabout plans of Hashem were ... for our benefit in the end (*Daas U’s’vunos*, 54).

While we eagerly await the time of *Moshiach*, we have a taste of it in our celebration of the holiday of Purim. While we yearn for the gift of universal retrospection which will only be granted to us during Messianic days, we still have the blessing of hindsight which comes at intervals in our life’s journey. We cannot necessarily see Hashem’s masterful ways while experiencing life, but may, or may not, catch a glimpse when we reflect back on events of our lives. Retrospection is a gift, it seems, of Messianic proportions -- to each of us, in our own little corners of the world. May we have continued “Purim moments” of retrospection, where, as Rav Soloveitchik explains, “events become understandable, endowed with rationality.”

<sup>1</sup> The Rav here is referencing Shemot 33:23. Moshe had asked to see the glory of Hashem, and Hashem responds “you will see My back.” This exchange is understood midrashically to be about questions of why good and bad things happen as they do; see Berachot 7a and Shemot Rabbah 45.

# Purim: The Hidden and the Revealed

Rabbi Daniel Olgin

Purim is a holiday of seeming contradictions. We fast and recite solemn *Selichos* prayers on Taanis Esther, but then we dress up in funky costumes, share gifts of food, enjoy a *seuda*, and drink. Sounds like fun. Another apparent contradiction: The Purim story is read from the Megillah, which means "scroll." The word shares a *shoresh* (grammatical root) with "*magaleh*," which means "reveal." Yet the story in the Megillah does not seem to reveal anything of a deeper nature. Indeed, of all the books in TaNaCh, it seems to reveal the least. The entire story seems to be completely natural; even the Name of Hashem is absent. How do we *reveal* concepts that are spiritually meaningful for our lives from this story that seems to be only about the natural and ordinary?

Let's take a closer look. A rebbe of mine, Rabbi Akiva Tatz, teaches that names are the ultimate expression of a person's essence. The Hebrew word for "name" is "*shem*"; the same letters spell "*sham*," which means "there." "There" is the final stage of a journey or process, its ultimate purpose. It is interesting that the same root is also the basis of the word for Heaven, *Shamayim*, the spiritual world, which is the Ultimate Destination.

The significance of names is reflected in the Gemara in Chullin 139b, which asks where Haman's name is found in the Torah. The Gemara assumes that the essence of what Haman represents must have its root in Torah, and if we can find his name in the Torah we will be able to understand what his essence is. The Gemara answers that Haman's name appears after the debacle of Adam and Chava eating from the tree in Gan Eden, when Hashem approaches them and asks, "הֲיָדַעְתָּ לֵבְךָ אֶת-אֲדָמָה אֲכָלָהּ מִפְּרִי הָעֵץ, וְאָמַרְתָּ לֵבְךָ לֹא אָכַלְתִּי" - Did you eat from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" The word "*hamin*" without vowels, as the Torah is written, is *Haman*. When Hashem confronts Adam and asks "Did you eat from the tree?" the question is posed with the word "*hamin*," which is Haman.

What is the connection between Adam's story and the villain of Purim? By eating from the tree, Adam committed the first sin in human history and fell from his lofty spiritual heights. The Torah's account is startling. Hashem commands Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree. Adam does not pay heed, and when he senses Hashem's presence, he hides in the garden. He hides? It reminds me of playing peek-a-boo with a three

year old. We have all done it. The cute kid covers their eyes and face with their hands, and they think that you cannot see them until the hands are removed! Adam has become so blinded to reality that he thinks he can hide from the One who sees all. He is now blind to reality. He thinks he can hide from the Source.

But what's stranger is that Hashem plays along with him. Hashem says, so to speak, "OK, you are hiding in the bushes? I'll be like the parent of the child hiding behind his hands and say, "Where are you?" And then Hashem asks questions, as if He does not already know the answers: "*Hamin ha'etz* - did you eat from the tree?" Adam thinks he can hide from G-d, and G-d plays along. How pathetic.

What allowed Adam and Chava this false perception that they were alone, that they could hide from Hashem? Eating from the tree, the very first sin in history, created a chasm between Hashem and His creation. As a result of that gap, the idea of "doubt" entered the world. Is it possible to hide from Him? Who knows? Perhaps He really cannot see, and does not know that Adam has sinned?

This brings us to the connection between Haman and that first sin. The Hebrew word for "doubt" is "*safek*." The gematria of *safek* (ספק – 60+80+100) is the same as that of *Amalek* (עמלק – 70+40+30+100). The chasm of doubt is named *Amalek*. In the Megillah, Haman is the ultimate expression of Amalek, of the "doubt" whose existence in the world is introduced by the word *hamin*. Who was Haman? He was a direct descendant of Agag, the king of Amalek. Amalek represents the single-minded aim to destroy the Jewish people in an attempt to demonstrate to the world that there is no Divine providence. It's all chance, luck of the draw, a game of dice. Using that concept of chance, Haman plans to destroy the entire Jewish people in one day. Would that not cause us to doubt Hashem and His *hashgacha*?

How do we deal with doubt in our lives?

Our world is a mixture of good and evil, doubt and certainty, as a result of the sin of Adam. We spend our lifetimes separating good from bad and finding certainty within doubt. Purim reflects this concept, as Hashem seems to have gone into hiding. He has put on a mask, and the mask is the natural world. On Purim we peel back the mask and reveal the Hand that guides us all.

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<p>In Memory of <b>Mr. Joseph Feigenbaum</b> (Yosef Meir Ben Yitzchak) and <b>Mrs. Sonja Feigenbaum</b> (Sasha Chaya bas Harav Shlomo Ha'cohen) from their children</p>	<p>לזכר נשמת ברוך שעי' בן חיים</p>
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