

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
*with Reb Yoel Kahn*



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The Mishnah says, "He who reads the *megilah* in reverse has not fulfilled his obligation." According to the simple meaning, this refers to reading the second chapter before the first. However, the Baal Shem Tov interpreted this as referring to someone who reads the *megilah* "in reverse"—as a story that took place many years ago. Such a person "has not fulfilled his obligation." Rather, when one reads the *megilah*, one must reflect on the story and derive lessons that are applicable now as well. It is obvious that this applies to the details of the story as well; but all the more so must one take a lesson from the story as a whole.

## A PROSPEROUS TIME

The Rebbe once focused on a general idea of the *megilah*, as follows: During the era that preceded Haman's decree, the Jewish nation was found in a remarkable situation, the likes of which they have never experienced (at least when still in *golus*). Mordechai—a member of the Sanhedrin—was appointed as a minister "*who sat at the gates of the king's palace*." Furthermore, Mordechai was in the unique position of having saved the king's life, foiling the plot of Bigsan and Teresh to poison him. This gave him the opportunity for his opinions to be reckoned with in the king's court. And then there was Queen Esther. Never in history did the Jews have such advantages on their side: the queen was a Jewess, and the minister who sat at the gates of the palace was a member of the Sanhedrin who had saved the king's life!

Yet, during that very period in time, Haman's decree came into the picture. There was never a decree against the Jews that was as terrible as Haman's. Haman wanted to destroy every Jew—"men, women, and children"—in one day, and there was nowhere to escape. *Chazal* tell us that Hashem dispersed the Jews throughout the world because of His kindness, so that if Jews are persecuted in one country, those found elsewhere will be spared. But Achashveirosh ruled over the entire civilized world. The decree to annihilate the Jews was to be carried out in one day, and there would be nowhere to run! So the story of the *megilah* is characterized by a unique paradox: the Jews were in the best possible situation, with representatives in the king's court, yet the decree against them was the worst of its kind!

Now let's see what happened next: When Mordechai and Esther attempted to annul the evil decree, the first logical step should have been to send a delegation to the king. Yet they did not adopt such an

## SEEING IN THE DARK

approach. Instead, Mordechai garbed himself with sackcloth and ashes, and Esther asked him to urge the Jews in Shushan to fast for three days, while she and her maidservants would do the same.

Seemingly, upon hearing about such a decree, the first step should have been to engage in an effort to revoke it by sending a delegation of important individuals to find favor in the eyes of the king! After all, according to *derech hateva*, one cannot influence a king with spiritual acts and piety. To the contrary: The first person who might be able to influence the king is the queen, and fasting for three days before approaching him is **detrimental** to finding favor in his eyes! And yet, this is what brought about the salvation! All this is quite perplexing. What was going on?

## RECOGNIZING THE SOURCE

The explanation serves as a lesson for the Jewish nation in all times: Mordechai was well aware that the Jewish nation is compared to a lone sheep among seventy wolves, yet it remains protected. Such an existence cannot be explained naturally; it is a supernatural phenomenon orchestrated by Hashem himself. Mordechai was privy to the reason why the decree took place. It wasn't a shortage of diplomacy—after all, he sat at the gates of the palace! It was because they benefited from Achashveirosh's party, or because they prostrated to a statue (as the Gemara says). And being that it was clear to him that **this** was the reason for the decree, it was imperative first and foremost to annul the **reason**, which is through doing *teshuvah*.

This is why the first thing Mordechai and Esther did was to establish three days of fasting (and as the Midrash explains, the Jews abstained from food and drink to rectify having benefited from Achashveirosh's party), and then Mordechai gathered Jewish children and taught them Torah. After having accomplished this, Mordechai and Esther proceeded to create a vessel in nature. This is because **Hashem** commanded us to do work through nature as well, as the *possuk* says, "*Hashem will bless you in all that you do.*" This is why Esther then approached Achashveirosh. But first and foremost, the reason for the decree had to be annulled through fasting and *teshuvah*. And this is the general lesson we must learn from the story of the *megilah*.

Another point: One can presume that all this is true in a time of *giluy elokus*, when Hashem's presence is revealed. In such a time, we can

understand that one must rely on spiritual means to affect a salvation. But the story of the *megilah* shows us otherwise: The Gemara explains that the source for Esther in the Torah is from the *possuk*, *v'anochi hasteir astir panai bayom hahu* – “And I will hide my face on that day,” indicating that it was a time when *elokus* was concealed. Furthermore, the *megilah* was written in such a way that Hashem’s name is not mentioned in it even once. This is in contrast to the Jewish conduct to mention Hashem’s name on a constant basis (as opposed to the conduct of Eisav). Yes, there are allusions to Hashem’s name in the *megilah*; but it is not mentioned explicitly at all.

## A PERSIAN NAME

Another illustration of the concealment at the time is the name of Purim. Purim is not a Hebrew word. It is a Persian word, which means “lots.” And since the *megilah* was written in *lashon kodesh*, it has to explain what the word *pur* means, so that those who don’t know Persian will be able to understand: “he casted a pur, that is, a lot.” Seemingly, the *megilah* could have used the word *goral* to begin with, instead of saying *pur* and then explaining that a *pur* means a lot? But this shows us the extent of the concealment: even when a great miracle took place and a name had to be chosen, the name chosen was one based on a Persian word, as it was necessary to reckon with the opinion of the gentiles.

Some commentaries explain that the reason Hashem’s name is not mentioned is because they were concerned that it would be translated into Persian, and Hashem’s name would be substituted with a name of *avodah zarah*. But first of all, it is unclear if this was indeed the case. The *megilah* concludes by saying that the story was recorded “in the books of the chronicles of the kings of Maday and Paras,” so it seems that there was no need for them to translate the *megilah*. And even if this was a valid concern, it further underscores the extent of the concealment, that there was a need to deal with the concern of Hashem’s name being replaced with a name of *avodah zarah*!

And notwithstanding the great concealment of *elokus* at the time, the method employed by Mordechai and Esther to annul the decree was through fasting, *teshuvah*, and bolstering the *chinuch* of children. This approach is not only true when it comes to matters involving the entire Jewish nation, but also regarding every Jew in particular. The existence and life of every Jew is higher than nature. Yes, one must create a vessel in nature, but that is nothing more than a *levush* through which Hashem’s *berachos* can be obtained.

## IN THE FACE OF NATURE

The Rebbe often quoted the Gemara which brings down a certain *possuk* that contains six words, and explains that each word corresponds to one of the *Shishah Sidrei Mishnah*. The first word is *emunas*—faith, and the Gemara explains that this corresponds to *Seder Zera'im*, the *seder* that deals with the *halachos* of produce. What is the connection between faith and harvesting produce? Tosafos explains that a farmer must place his faith in Hashem when sowing seeds in his field.

This seems hard to understand. Why does a person need faith in order to sow seeds? Isn’t this a natural occurrence? If a person were to refrain from sowing, relying instead on Hashem to send him *man* from the heavens, it would be understood why he needs faith. But why is faith necessary when doing something that will **naturally** result in the growing of food?

The explanation is as stated above: A Jew must recognize that even acts that appear to fall under the rubric of nature are in reality beyond nature. Why is he sowing seeds? Not because this is what **nature** demands, but because this is how **Hashem** determined the produce will grow; **Hashem** determined that he will give his *berachos* when a person creates a vessel. Certainly a person must create a *levush* in nature. But he must be aware of what is merely a *levush* and what is the true source of the *berachah*.

## AN UNSIGNED CHECK

The Rebbe once gave an analogy for this idea: Let’s say a person arrives at a bank to obtain financial support. Being that he doesn’t want to wait, he rushes quickly so that he will be at the front of line. But the problem is that he has no signatures. The first thing required is to obtain signatures, and the signatures must be from wealthy individuals. Of course, once a person has obtained such signatures, he must wait in line to exchange them for support. But he must first have what to exchange!

The first thing a person must do is to ensure that he has what to exchange, and that must be provided by the wealthiest Entity of all—“to Me is the gold and silver, says Hashem,” by learning Torah and performing *mitzvos*. And this approach must be taken not only when *elokus* is revealed, but even when it is concealed, “and I will hide My face,” even when the name of the Yom Tov is based on a Persian word. Even in such a time, one must realize that his life and existence, even when it comes to **physical** things, come from Hashem and that “He who provides life provides sustenance.” Hashem merely wants us to create a *levush* in nature, but the source of one’s sustenance is beyond nature and is based on one’s connection to Hashem.

For further learning see לקו"ש חלק א' וחלק ו'.



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