

## PURIM 5778

Simple-minded people say the world is easily understood through science. But it isn't so simple. The physical world contains tremendously deep and intricate wisdom. Every last detail of every living creature is finely tuned to coordinate properly with its environment and with other living creatures. If this is true about the physical world, all the more so with the Jewish people. We have a paradox. On the one hand there is free will, but what happens to us is still coordinated from above.

There is *tevah*, which means Hashem created the world and runs it according to strict rules. This is true for both the physical and spiritual worlds. When the Torah says a certain food is forbidden, there is a very detailed system to decide when it is forbidden and when it becomes permitted with very precise rules. Hashem runs history with another set of very precise and exact rules.

Megillas Esther is an incredible *sefer*. We spoke about different aspects of Purim earlier—about *chessed*—and now we will discuss a new topic. *Hashgocho protis*.

Why do we celebrate Purim as a holiday?

The Rambam says *nevi'im* (which means Mordechai and Esther) along with the Sanhedrin instituted a *Yom Tov* in their time to give praise to Hashem for saving us and to praise Him for answering our *tefillas*. We do this again on Purim in our day to proclaim the truth to the world: Hashem is close to us and listens to our *tefillas*. This is Purim and Megillas Esther in a nutshell.

Let us try to understand this.

There is free will which will give me power to do what I choose to do. But Hashem is certainly running everything that happens—so how do they go together?

The best illustration of this is Yosef. He had a dream that he would become king. The brothers were extremely jealous of him. It was decreed in *bris bein habesorim* that *golus mitzrayim* would begin while Yaakov and Yosef were alive. Hashem knew Yosef's character—he was extremely dedicated to carrying out his father's wishes, and He knew how far his brothers will go to get rid of Yosef. Hashem arranges to cause Yaakov to instruct Yosef to visit his brothers in Shechem. Even though his brothers hated him with a passion, Yosef did not refuse his father nor did he give up when it became difficult.

Hashem works with the patterns of behavior that people already set up within themselves with their free will to carry out His will. Yosef said it directly when he told his brothers they are not responsible for what ultimately happened to him.

Yosef didn't become king right away. He was given test after test and overcame them with his free will until he became worthy. Hashem knew that Yosef had the power to overcome the *nisyonos*, He gave him those *nisyonos* to grow from, to become king of Egypt. Hashem works with everyone's free will to arrange the result He wants to happen.

There are certain areas where Hashem doesn't work through the rules of nature—like rain and *parnossoh*. It comes when we have the merit and we remain dependent on Him alone. We need to daven for it regularly.

Another aspect of the world which is in the hands of Hashem is the rulers of countries. Hashem is in control of this level of human society directly. Who becomes the leader and how they rule is part of Hashem's plan.

It was clear that Achashveirosh was not naturally suited to rule an empire. You would never have predicted it in advance. A royal daughter fell in love with a stable boy, the emperor dies, and he takes over. But he naturally remains insecure about his position. It is based on his wife's royal blood—not his.

Hashem is running everything.

One day, when Achashveirosh gets drunk, it becomes quite easy to manipulate such a person and a lot of things come together. He calls for his queen to degrade herself in public. All this is background.

Klal Yisroel are participating in a feast which is absolutely inappropriate and it needs a severe response. But Hashem wants to give them an opportunity for *teshuvah*. He arranges this stand-off between Achashveirosh and Vashti, where Mehumon—aka Homon—sees an opportunity to take advantage of this insecure emperor to further his own domestic agenda against his wife.

Homon then gets elevated to a top position. Esther, the niece of Mordechai—a *nevi'ah*—becomes the queen. A very unusual chain of events. Mordechai suspects the hand of Hashem is at work here.

Mordechai instructs Esther—don't tell anyone you are Jewish. And surprisingly, all the Jews of Shushan also comply and do not reveal the secret. Why didn't they? Mordechai understood that if Esther became the queen, it must be because Hashem has a plan here that He wants to execute. Mordechai didn't want the Jews of the empire to know the queen is Jewish so that they wouldn't rely on her when they get in trouble. People in Israel today think we have real security and we can do whatever we want, now that there are Jews in the White House who are so close to the President. But this is not what we should put our trust in. Don't think that there is some person who will save us besides Hashem.

The story unfolds and no-one understands why the situation is getting worse and worse. You have an insecure king, and a powerful and manipulative prime minister, a secretive Jewish queen, and religious fanatic inciting the prime minister to the point where his entire nation is in jeopardy. Hashem is putting everyone in the right place to carry out His plan. Klal Yisroel has sinned seriously and deserve punishment but Hashem wants to give them a way out.

Imagine how the Jewish media would portray Mordechai today—flouting the law in front of Homon and putting all Jewish lives at stake! He is a horrible chillul Hashem!

Mordechai instructs Esther to petition the king. Esther hesitates because it would put her life in danger. He responds—you are now in position to save Klal Yisroel. Hashem put you here in the palace at this time for a reason. She says, if there is such a gezeirah in Heaven to destroy Klal Yisroel, it can't be up to me and my position in the palace to save them! I will only be successful if Klal Yisroel at the same time will do teshuvoh and daven with me for salvation. Mordechai makes it very clear that if Hashem saves Klal Yisroel, it is because of our tefillos and teshuvoh. We are only a tool. If it doesn't happen through you then it will be through someone else. We are all working within Hashem's master plan. You were put in this position for a purpose, but Klal Yisroel need to change and correct what they did wrong for the plan to work.

Esther goes into the king's throne room unbidden. Achashveirosh extends the scepter to her and she sees an opportunity coming from Hashem to hatch some kind of scheme. She sees that miraculously, she finds favor in Achashveirosh's eyes after three days of fasting and davening! Chazal are telling us that she understood very clearly that it had nothing to do with her beauty and charm. Hashem will give her favor in the king's eyes even after three days of fasting and crying her eyes out. Esther was davening beforehand that Klal Yisroel should have the merits to arrange enough miracles to achieve a salvation.

She asks for Homon and Achashveirosh to meet her at a party. She senses that the time is not yet right and asks to make another party tomorrow. And at the night before the second party, there was a sudden turnaround. Nodedoh shnas hamelech. The critical time had come to decide the fate of Klal Yisroel. There was a parallel going on between the spiritual and physical worlds. Both Hashem and Achashveirosh didn't sleep that night. Rashi says at the same time, Achashveirosh developed a paranoia—maybe Esther is trying to kill me and she is making a plot between herself and Homon?

How did all this happen? Because Hashem, years earlier, brought this stable boy to power with a permanent state of insecurity. Now he sees Homon coming to him in the middle of the night and he tests him. What does Homon really want for himself? He asks to wear the royal crown. This confirms Achashveirosh's suspicions. Achashveirosh has one friend who he knows is looking out for his welfare. Mordechai saved his life so he has to make sure Mordechai is rewarded—right now—in order to preserve the one ally he has in the world. And when he tells Homon to go put the crown on Mordechai and parade him through the streets, all Homon's plans start to unravel very rapidly. The Jews are saved through the most unlikely chain of events at the last moment.

So why do we read Megillas Esther? Why do we celebrate

Purim?

For two reasons. The Rambam says it is to understand what is running history. A lot of human beings with all their quirks and manias and jealousies are being pitted against each other very carefully. All of this is done to see if Klal Yisroel will take notice and react properly with teshuvoh. Hashem is sending us a message and Mordechai and Esther say it clearly—we are only tools in Hashem's hands to execute His plans. He is giving us an opportunity to be the right tool to inspire teshuvoh at the right time.

Purim is a holiday to publicize to the next generations how Hashem runs the world behind the scenes. Today we have so many volatile world leaders with outsized egos in charge of weapons of mass destruction. North Korea, the United States, Iran, Israel. Without belief in hashgocho protis and lev melochim beyad Hashem, it is absolutely frightening how close the world is to coming to an end. Hashem has His plans.

But we've seen this kind of stage before. We had Belshazar the emperor of Bavel who had a daughter who fell in love with a stable boy. Belshazar is suddenly killed and this stable boy suddenly becomes the emperor. He moves the entire capitol city to Shushan, throws a 180 day drinking party and does so many paranoid things in order to get more secure in his position. He has his queen killed, and then he elevates his advisor to be the most powerful person in the empire. Then he gets paranoid about this very advisor and his new queen! It all surrounds the aveiros and teshuvah of Klal Yisroel.

You won't find it in history books. You need Chazal and meforshim to point it out to us.

The Rambam says we celebrate Purim to publicize this hidden truth. It has to be proclaimed because it isn't obvious. We declare that those who trust in Hashem will not be let down when they call out to Him sincerely and do teshuvah.

You can have the Prime Minister of Israel mouth off to Iran in their face, and the president of the United States insulting the leader of North Korea on line in public. Hashem is using all these people to arrange a situation where Klal Yisroel realize that it is all hanging in the balance because of them. When they call out to Hashem by davening and doing teshuvoh, Hashem will make it all work out towards an incredible salvation.

This is the purpose of Purim—to praise Hashem and recognize Him as the source of all brocho in the world. We read the Megillah at this time to show the world that Hashem saves us and He is close to us and listens to us. And to tell all subsequent generations that it is true: we are a special people that Hashem cares about and wants us to call out to Him. This is how Hashem runs history at all times. It is based on our mitzvos and aveiros, our teshuvoh and our tefillah.