

# Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Purim 5770

## **Why did the Jews in that generation deserve destruction? Because they had pleasure from the feast of that wicked man (King Achashverosh). (Megillah 12a)**

When Chazal looked at Haman's decree, they perceived clearly why it came. But the simple Jews of the time saw the decree as the result of Mordechai's refusal to bow to Haman. They complained to Mordechai and blamed their predicament on him, as the Gemara says (Megillah 12b): "See what the Judean and the Benjaminite did to me!"

Looking deeper, we see that the Jews' attending the feast and their blaming the decree on Mordechai are two sides of the same coin. Mordechai, as the gadol hador, certainly warned the Jews not to attend the feast, or else there would be dire consequences. They disregarded his warning, yet nothing bad happened to them. Nine years later, Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, and the Jews warned him that he was bringing danger upon them. And indeed, Haman immediately decreed death upon all the Jews. The gadol hador, with his "daas Torah", could not have looked more wrong.

When did the Jews finally recognize that Mordechai had been right? When Mordechai became the king's prime minister. Their whole reason for attending the feast had been to mingle with the gentiles and thus gain respect in their eyes. For the same reason, they held that bowing to Haman was the correct path. But now, who had gained the most respect in the king's eyes? Mordechai, who had opposed attending the feast and refused to bow to Haman and his idol. This was the ultimate proof that standing by our Torah principles, rather than assimilation, is the key to our survival.

This is why we sum up the central lesson of the Megillah with the words: "The rose of Yaakov was elated and joyful when they saw together the royal blue of Mordechai." Seemingly, it should have said that they were joyful when they saw that they had triumphed over their enemies. But the answer is that it is more important to understand why we were in danger and why we were saved - as a lesson for the future. We must always remember that following the directives of the gedolei hador is the way to safety, even if at the time it seems that they are leading us to danger and not following them would lead to safety.

This is the meaning of Chazal's statement (Megillah 7b) that a man must drink until he cannot distinguish between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." He must get to the point where he mixes up the words and says "blessed is Haman" and "cursed is Mordechai." And even then - even when it seems to him that following the gedolei hador will lead to curses for the Jewish people and blessings for its enemies, he must have faith and follow them (Rabbi Moshe Meir Lederman).

In our times we are witness to a classic example of this. The gedolei hador warned the Jewish people against the Zionist plan to establish a state, quoting the terrifying admonition: "If you keep the oath, good, but if not, I will declare your flesh ownerless like the gazelles and deer of the field" (Kesubos 111a). Yet when the Zionists went ahead and established a state, that tragedy did not materialize. True, the state has brought on a cycle of wars and violence in which 14,000 Jews have lost their lives, and even one lost life is a good enough reason why the state should not have been established. But this is still nothing on the scale of Chazal's warning.

Today, the gedolei hador instruct us that giving up the state is the only path to safety. The Satmar Rebbe writes in Al Hageulah V'al Hatemurah, siman 44: "Even now, if they were to give up their state and their government, there is no doubt that they would take Hashem's anger away from the Jewish people... Every minute that they hold on to their power, they are offending the Creator, blessed be He, with violation of the oaths and rebellion against the nations, which the holy Torah has forbidden and for which we have been warned of a severe punishment." Many people read these words but think they know better. To them, it is obvious that giving up the state today would place the Jewish people in danger.

The Purim story teaches us that we must have emunas chachamim. What the chachamim say is dangerous is dangerous, and what they say is safe is safe, even if it looks to us otherwise. When we keep to the terms of the exile in which Hashem placed us, we are under His protection, but when we violate those terms, we are vulnerable.

The classic statement about Hashem's protection of us in exile is found in the Hagadah of Pesach: "And this is what has stood by our fathers and us, for not only one arose against us to destroy us, but in every generation they arise against us to destroy us, and the Holy One, blessed is He, saves us from their hands."

Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (an early Rishon), in his commentary Maasei Hashem on the Hagadah, asks: Why do we need Hashem to promise us that in every generation they will try to destroy and He will save us? Wouldn't it be better if we weren't persecuted in the first place? He answers that the words "this is what has stood..." do not refer to a promise, i.e. that Hashem's promise has stood by us to protect us from attacks. Rather, they mean that the very phenomenon of the nations persecuting us and Hashem saving us has stood by us as the proof in every generation that Hashem still loves us. If, on the other hand, He simply overthrew our oppressors, it would only prove His hatred for them, not His love for us.

But according to this, what is the connection to the previous paragraph in the Hagadah, which quotes Hashem's promise to Avraham Avinu? Doesn't this show that "this is what has stood by our fathers and us" refers back to that promise? The Maasei Hashem explains: Hashem promised that Avraham's descendents would be slaves, in order to eventually leave Egypt in a miraculous way, receive the Torah and spread the belief in Hashem in the world. And the promise was fulfilled with the children of Israel, not Avraham's other descendents: the Ishmaelites, the Edomites or the children of Keturah. This showed His special love for the Israelites. But the memory of the Exodus faded in the world's consciousness, and therefore there needs to a reminder of Hashem's love for us in every generation. That reminder is the persecution of the Jews and Hashem saving them from it.

The Maharal (Netzach Yisroel Chapter 10) makes a similar observation on Megillah 11a, which quotes the verse "I did not reject them nor despise them" (Vayikra 26:44) and interprets each part as a reference to a different danger encountered by the Jews in exile, and the people who saved them: Daniel and his companions saved them from Babylon, Mordechai and Esther from Haman, Shimon Hatzadik and the Hasmoneans from the Greeks, and Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi and the Sages of every generation from the Romans. Had Hashem simply influenced the hearts of the leaders not to harm the Jews, says the Maharal, this would not have shown that He did not reject the Jewish people. But when He put Jews in positions from which they were able to save their people, that showed His special love and protection for them.

The Gemara (Megillah 6b) says that the months of Purim and Pesach are always consecutive - even in a leap year when there are two Adars, we keep Purim in the second Adar - in order to draw a parallel between the redemption from Egypt and the redemption from Haman's decree. Just as we saw Hashem's love for us in the redemption from Egypt, so we see it His protection over us in exile. Exile is where Hashem wants us to be in our times, and that is the path to true safety.



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