



A SIGNIFICANT LESSON FROM THE ODDEST OF SOURCES

One of the more common themes associated with Megilas Esther is Divine intervention. Even those familiar with the story are surprised, from year to year, how Hashem set up a perfect story, with each piece of the puzzle locking in at the right time. All this was done in a hidden manner — *hester panim*. If we look closely at the Megilah we see an additional theme to the story; one that many of us, our students, and our children need to be reminded of. What is odd, however, is the source for this most crucial lesson.

At the beginning of the Megilah we are told about Achashveirosh's big party:

וַיְהִי, בַּיָּמִים אֲחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ... בַּיָּמִים, הָהֵם--כְּשֶׁבֶת
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵירוֹשׁ, עַל כֶּסֶּא מַלְכוּתוֹ, ...
בְּשָׁנַת שְׁלוֹשׁ, לְמַלְכוֹ, עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה, לְכָל-שָׂרָיו
וְעַבְדָּיו...

And it happened in the days of Achashveirosh ... in those days, that King Achashveirosh sat on his throne ... in the third year of his reign he made a party for all his servants and workers. Esther 1:1-3

Why did Achashveirosh wait three years? Rashi (as well as Ibn Ezra) quotes the Gemarah in *Megilah* 11b:

'בימים ההם כשבת המלך' וכתוב בתריה
'בשנת שלש למלכו' - אמר רבא: מאי כשבת?
לאחר שנתיישה דעתו.
"In those days, that King Achashveirosh sat" ... it further states, "in the third year of his reign." Rava said: What does it mean "that [King Achashveirosh] sat (k'sheves)"? After his mind was settled (nisyashva).



Achashveirosh was well aware of the prophecies mentioned in Sefer Yirmiyahu and Sefer Daniel, which

promised a return to Zion seventy years following the destruction. Achashveirosh, according to his incorrect calculations, felt that the seventy years were over, and therefore concluded that the prophecy would not take place. If the prophecy would not take place, then the Jews will not return to Zion, and perhaps the Jewish God is upset at them, or has even given up on them. These conclusions gave Achashveirosh a sense of *yishuv hadaas*, and as the Gemarah explains, the party only happened after his mind was settled.

Perhaps there were personal benefits to Achashveirosh if the Jewish God did indeed give up on the Jews. If, however, Achashveirosh, as an anti-Semite, wanted to celebrate our continued despair and destruction, why would he celebrate only after our Jewish God is not on our side? His hatred seems to be based on acknowledging Hashem himself!

If we fast forward all the way to chapter 6, this idea returns.

וַיִּסְפֹּר הֶמֶן לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ, וְלִכְלֹל-אֶהְבִּיו, אֶת, כָּל-אֲשֶׁר קָרְהוּ; וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ, אִם מְזַרְעֵ הִיְהוּדִים מְרַדְּכֵי אֲשֶׁר הַחֲלוּתָ לְנַפְלָ לְפָנָיו לֹא-תוּכַל לוֹ--כִּי-נִפְּוֹל תִּפּוּל, לְפָנָיו.

And Haman told over to his wife Zeresh and all his friends, all that had transpired. And his wise men and Zeresh said to him: If Mordechai is from the seed of Judaism, and you have begun to fall to him, you won't be able to overcome him, because you will fall to him.

Anyone who reads this pasuk should be confused. Haman wants to kill the Jews. Zeresh is his wife. It was Zeresh who had the advice to hang Mordechai on the tree at the end of chapter 5. Now she is giving up? What caused Zeresh to change her entire philosophy and let Haman know that he stands no chance?

Toward the end of the Megilah, when the news spreads about the reversal of the decree to kill the Jews, we find an interesting response from the locals. In chapter 8 we read:

וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּבְכָל-עִיר וָעִיר, מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וַדָּתוֹ מִגֵּיעַ, שְׂמֵחָה וְשִׂשׂוֹן לַיהוּדִים, מִשְׂתָּה וַיּוֹם טוֹב; וְרַבִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ, מִתְיַהֲדִים--כִּי-נִפְּל פַּחַד-הַיהוּדִים, עֲלֵיהֶם

In every state and city, every place where the word of the king arrived, there was joy and happiness for the Jews, feast and celebration, and many from the nations of the land converted, for the fear of the Jews fell over them.

Again we find a fear of Jews. It is this fear that permeates our story. Achashveirosh would love to kill us and celebrate our destruction. Yet out of fear of Hashem, he is very cautious in how he goes about it. Zeresh, aware of Hashem, understands deep down that He is involved in the world and that He will protect the Jews and foil her husband's plan. Many of the locals, after seeing how Divine intervention controlled the seemingly impossible

outcome, decide on their own that this is the proper path.

We can now truly appreciate the *Medrash Rabbah* (similarly quoted in the Gemarah, Megilah 13b).

The *Medrash Rabbah*, Esther Parshah 7 states:

אמר ריש לקיש: בשעה שאמר המן הרשע לאחשורוש בא ונאבד את ישראל מן העולם, אמר לו אחשורוש: לא יכלת להון, בדיל דאלההון, לא שביק לון כל עיקר, תא חזי מה עביד לון למלכין קמאי... וכל מאן דאתי עליהון למבדינהו מן עלמא ודיעץ עליהון מיבטל מן עלמא...

Reish Lakish states: At the moment that Haman said to Achashveirosh, let us wipe out the Jews from the world, Achashveirosh responded: I can't overcome their God. I am scared of Him, and will not win, for see what the great previous kings did (Paroh and Sancheiriv) and look what happened to them ... and anyone who tries to wipe out His people, himself gets wiped out of the world.

It seems that although Achashveirosh, at the opening of the Megilah, was under the impression that Hashem had given up on us, he was still cautious and fearful of actively killing Hashem's people. How did Haman convince him then to step forward? The medrash continues:

מיד אמר לון המן: אלוה שטבע פרעה בים ועשה נסים לישראל... הוא זקן ואינו יכול לעשות כלום, שכבר עלה נבוכדנצר והחריב ביתו ושרף את היכלו והגלה את ישראל ופזרן בין האומות, והיכן כחו וגבורתו שכבר הזקין... מיד קבלו דבריו לכלות את ישראל.

Immediately Haman responded: Their God that drowned Paroh in the sea and performed all the miraculous wonders, He is elderly and has no more strength, as we see that Nevuchadnetzar rose up, and destroyed His house, and burned His dwelling place and exiled the Jews and spread them around, so what power

does he have left? ... Immediately Achashveirosh (and his advisors) agreed to annihilate the Jewish people.

How ironic it is that the only way to convince the enemy that they can successfully hurt the Jews is to remove from within themselves a fear of Hashem.

We can also use this idea to explain why Haman wanted to originally kill us. In Perek 3 we read:

ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה... ויגידו להמן אשר הוא יהודי... וימלא המן חמה. *And Mordechai would not bow down (to Haman)... and they told Haman that he was a Jew... and Haman became furious.*

Haman was not only upset that a person was not bowing down to him. His anger was not even out of hatred towards the Jews. Rather his fury had some fear mixed in. If a Jew will go against my plan, will I ever become the all powerful entity that I wish to be? Perhaps Haman thinks that the Jewish God might still be on the side of the Jews.

From the oddest of sources — our major enemies — we gain a reinforcement of Hashem's existence and His involvement in the world. In yesteryear, many Jews were *baalei emunah peshuta*. They simply believed, and did not question. In today's world, many find that approach challenging. Some believe in Hashem but have trouble seeing His hand in the day to day. Others find trouble simply believing. Before researching and studying any proofs or evidence for this fundamental first step of our religion, let us be reminded of how obvious Hashem's power was from the oddest of sources: those who were against us and our God.