



SETTING THE STAGE FOR SALVATION

When we read through the text of Megillat Esther, it's easy to be puzzled by the inclusion of the first two chapters. The core "Purim" story seems to begin with the decree against the Jews, continue with the intervention of Mordechai and Esther, and conclude with the miraculous salvation of the Jews. Though the first few chapters add layer and intrigue to the story, they seem to be a superfluous prologue.

Would we understand the story of Purim without knowing how Vashti was banished from the kingdom? Would we understand the salvation of the Jews without knowing how Esther became queen or that Mordechai had foiled an attempted assassination? While on the surface the answer to



those questions seems to be yes, the inclusion of the first two chapters of Megillat Esther implies otherwise, and we are tasked with finding the deeper understanding they add to our primary story.

Chazal seemed troubled by this very question. The Gemara in Megilla 13b, explains the role of the first two

chapters in our understanding of the Purim story:

”אחר הדברים האלה.” (אחר מאי?) אמר רבא: אחר שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא רפואה למכה. דאמר ריש לקיש: אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מכה את ישראל אלא אם כן בורא להם רפואה תחילה, שנאמר: ”כרפאי לישראל ונגלה עון אפרים”.

The verse explains when the rest of the events of the Megilla occurred: “After these events did King Ahasuerus promote Haman” (Esther 3:1). The Gemara asks: After what particular events? Rava said: Only after the Holy One, Blessed be He, created a remedy for the blow and set in place the chain of events that would lead to the miraculous salvation was Haman appointed, setting the stage for the decree against the Jews to be issued. Rava explains: As Reish Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, does

not strike at the Jewish people unless He has already created a remedy for them beforehand, as it is stated: "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered" (Hosea 7:1).

Translation: The William Davidson Koren Noe Talmud

The first two chapters of the Megillah teach us that before G-d brings about a danger to the Jewish people, He first creates the cure. This is in contrast to the way G-d works when sending danger to non-Jewish nations. As the Gemara in Megillah 13b continues:

אָבֵל אֹמֵרוֹת הָעוֹלָם אֵינּוּ בֵּן — מִכָּה אוֹתָן
וְאַחֲרַי כִּן בּוֹרֵא לָהֶם רְפוּאָה, שְׁנֵאָמַר: "וְנִגְרַף ה'
אֶת מִצְרַיִם נִגְרִיף וְרְפוּאָה"

But this is not so with regard to the nations of the world. With them, God first strikes them, and only afterward does He create a remedy, as it is stated: "And the Lord shall smite Egypt, smiting and healing." (Isaiah 19:22)

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As it relates to the story of Megillat Esther, before G-d allowed the threat of Haman to be actualized, He first ensured that the road to healing was already paved, namely Esther's position as queen and Mordechai's role in saving the king.

This theme is brought out by the commentators throughout the stories of Tanach: the commandment of the Mishkan prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the birth of Moshe prior to the worsening of conditions for Jews in Egypt, the commandment about the Parah Adumah prior to the deaths of Miriam and Aharon.

While this explanation of Resh Lakish helps us to understand the inclusion of the prologue in the Megillah, it leaves us with another question: Why

is the timing of the creation of the healing important for us to know? Does it matter *when* the healing was created, or that the healing was created at all? As long as the threat is avoided and the people are saved, why does it matter when the healing was initiated?

The goal was for the Jews to be saved; the threat was simply a means to that end.

The Malbim, in his commentary on the Megillah, addresses this question.

בימים ההם, טרם יבא אל ספור הצרה אשר
היה לישראל, הקדים רפואה למכה, להורות כי
המכה אינו למען הכות רק למען ירפא...
"In those days" Before it comes to tell the story of the suffering of the Jewish people, the remedy was set up before the crisis to teach us that the crisis is not for the purpose of punishment but rather for healing.

The purpose of telling us the creation of the healing prior to the creation of the danger is to teach us which part of the story is primary. It is not just the coincidental order of the story, it is an essential aspect of the story. The goal was for the Jews to be saved; the threat was simply a means to that end. The Malbim compares this to a bloodletter: he first prepares the tools that will be needed to stop the blood and heal the wound before he even creates the wound, because the ultimate goal is healing. The guiding force behind the decisions being made is the desire to heal.

That is perhaps why Reish Lakish highlights the fact that the concept of *hikdim refuah lamakah* only exists

in the way Hashem deals with Am Yisrael, not in the way He deals with the other nations of the world. There is something unique about the way He treats Bnei Yisrael in that when it comes to His people, healing and success are always the ultimate goal, and struggle and difficulty are just a means to that end.

It is also interesting to note that this theme is brought forth specifically in Megillat Esther, a book that takes place while Bnei Yisrael are in *galut*, and is famously known for the glaring absence of Hashem's name. Perhaps this makes the point even stronger: even in a time of *hester panim*, a time when it might seem like Hashem is absent and restricting His providence and involvement from His people, even then, He is putting the pieces in place for their salvation. Though it may be harder for us to see, Hashem is nonetheless still behind the scenes, making sure we are protected and set up for healing and salvation.

May we all be able to find the healing within our own personal challenges as well as the healing for our national challenges with the coming of Mashiach, *bimheira biyameinu*.