



How Purim Changed Everything

Rav Elan Mazer, Director, Mizrachi Canada

Of all the books in Tanach, Megillat Esther may be the most relatable to our lives today. The rest of Tanach is filled with prophecies, miracles, and a very clear understanding of why certain events are happening, and what Hashem expects from His people. Whenever the Jews in the Tanach faced a threat, the Navi of the day clarified what went wrong, and if we heeded his call and repented for our sins, we were ultimately spared the punishment.

Because of this dynamic between the people and the Navi, the reality of most of the Tanach is quite removed from our reality today. In contrast, Megillat Esther has none of these qualities: there is no prophecy nor explanation for why we deserved annihilation. There is fasting and repentance in the Megillah – but what was our sin? Similarly, there are no miracles, and Hashem's name is not even mentioned in the entire text. This dynamic is comparable to our experience today, and in a sense it is reassuring to have a book in Tanach that represents the current reality.

Another striking difference between the Megillah and the rest of Tanach – and indeed one of the strangest aspects of the Megillah story – is the way it ends. Haman's plan falls apart and the Jews are saved from annihilation, and then... nothing. The Pesach story ends with us becoming

a free nation under Hashem, and even the Chanuka story ends with us regaining Jewish Sovereignty over our land. However the Purim story doesn't have a similar dramatic finale. The last chapter of the Megillah tells us about some new taxation laws that were introduced, but the Jews of Shushan haven't undergone any significant changes – at the end of the Megillah they are still living in Shushan under Achashverosh, just like at the beginning.

Consequently, because the redemption was not complete and the story ends with us still subservient to a foreign king, the Gemara rules that we do not say Hallel on Purim, which then begs the obvious question: why are we even celebrating at all if the story didn't accomplish anything?

Certainly, the story of Purim must include a significant achievement, and the sages in the Midrash and the Gemara bring two distinct understandings of what that objective was.

The Midrash explains that while the Megillah story was taking place in Persia, there were other Jews hard at work in Jerusalem rebuilding the Temple, but when Achashverosh came to power he put a freeze on the building, which he then lifted at the end of the Purim story. Our sages saw the Purim story as the catalyst that brought about renewed

It's reassuring to have a book in Tanach that represents the current reality.

Continues on page 2...

permission from the Persian government to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash, and thus, an important event to be celebrated.

The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat, however, brings a different idea. The rabbis bring us back to Mount Sinai and describe a shocking account of what transpired there. As they explain, when Hashem gave us the Torah He did not give us a choice, but rather He placed the mountain over our heads and declared, "If you accept the Torah – good; if not – here will be your burial place." Rav Acha immediately points out the loophole: a contract made under duress is void, and thus we would not be obligated by the statutes of the Torah. Rava turns to Rav Acha and answers that we must still follow the Torah, because after the events of Purim we accepted the Torah willingly.

This Gemara is puzzling from beginning to end. Why would Hashem force us to accept the Torah? Did we not say "נעשה ונשמע" – we will do and we will listen? Also, when exactly during the Purim story did we accept the Torah willingly? The Ramban further asks: how was Rav Acha's question answered by the fact that they accepted the Torah willingly during the time of Purim – what about all the time in between? Did they not have to follow the mitzvot during all the years of the first Beit Hamikdash? And if they were indeed not obligated, why were they punished with the temple's destruction?

The Ramban addresses these questions by explaining that when we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, it only bound us during the time of the First Temple while in Israel, but after the Temple's destruction we can claim that the Torah was given under duress, until the story of Purim when we accepted the Torah willingly.

To clarify this somewhat puzzling answer, we must ask the next question: What, then, is the historical and significant difference between the two time periods brought by the Ramban: from Mount Sinai until the destruction of the First Temple, and from that point until the story of Purim?

I believe that the significance lies in the inherent difference between Tanach and the Megillah that we noted above. The coercion that Bnei Yisrael felt at the time of Mount Sinai may not have been the literal mountain over their heads, rather the events of their exodus from Egypt. They had just witnessed ten plagues, the splitting of the

sea, their complete victory over their captors, and the revelation of Hashem at Sinai. They had no choice but to accept the Torah; Hashem was literally in front of their eyes. Throughout the next forty years in the desert, and then during their foray into Israel, the prophet of the day was always there to keep them in line, and the constant miracles reminded them of Hashem's watchful eye. They were punished when they sinned and rewarded when they did not. Once the Temple was destroyed, however, the reality changed and the underlying coercion was over.

For children, punishments and rewards are part of daily life, as their parents watch over them, keep them safe, and attempt to instill values, morals, and proper behaviour. At some point, though, the child matures and leaves home, and thus shifts his motivation to behave as he did at home.

Living alone, there are no immediate punishments and rewards.

After the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people left their childhood home, but it took them until the end of the Purim story to fully mature and internalize the message.

After the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people left their childhood home, but it took them until the time of the Purim story to fully mature and internalize the message. Mordechai understood that Esther was placed in the position of Queen – by Hashem, thereby becoming His partner in saving the Jewish people: וְיָמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם-לָעֵת קְדָמָה הִנָּשְׂתִּי לְמַלְכוּת. Further, by pausing after their victory and initiating a holiday for generations, we see that

the entire people fully realized and understood that all the events leading to their redemption were orchestrated by Hashem, and that the values they learned at Mount Sinai can – and should – still be a part of their lives, even when the hand of Hashem is not always noticeable.

Many believe that there are no miracles today because we are less worthy than previous generations. Rav Kook believes the opposite. During the childhood of our nation, the grand miracles served to make us aware of Hashem, however with our maturity we gain the ability to see Hashem within the consistency of everyday life. Megillat Esther is unique among the books of the Tanach in that it allows us to view Hashem and our relationship with Him not through miracles and the medium of a Navi, but rather through our own lives and our own actions.

May we merit to see a final redemption similar to Purim, where Hashem is hidden among the natural events, and we are His earthly partners. Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameach!

We are Mizrachi Canada.

Mizrachi believes that the Torah should be at the center of Zionism and sees Jewish nationalism as a tool for achieving our religious objectives.

Today in Canada, Mizrachi runs educational and community programs, promoting and strengthening the Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel. Make the connection!

The World of Rav Kook: True Happiness

From Orot Hakodesh, Chelek Gimmel



כל המדות אפשר להעלותן, מפני שיש להן שורש בקדושה, חוץ מהעצבות שאין לה שורש כלל, כי עז וחדוה במקומו. וצריכים להעלות את סבתה, וכיון שהשורש מתעלה גם היא עולה. והשורש של העצבות הוא או גאווה או כעס, או דאגה, הבאה מסבתם, וכיוצא.

All character traits can be raised up, for they all are rooted in holiness. Except for despair, which has no root. For "strength and joy are in his [Hashem's] place" (Divrei Hayamim 1 16:27). We are obligated to raise up all our character traits to their [root] cause, and as its root is elevated, so to it rises. The root of despair is either arrogance or anger, or worry, it is caused by these and those similar to them.

Rav Kook has a holistic view of the world, and he believes that there is no such thing as a bad character trait. Every aspect of our personality was given to us by our Creator to do good. Anger or compassion, rebelliousness or obedience, and even arrogance can all be used for good. There is one exception: despair. We were not created to despair. We were created to build, create and grow. Despair comes from misusing the attributes that Hashem has given us. On Purim, we can be rid of all despair from our hearts, and focus on the joy of realizing that our entire being was created for a purpose and can be completely turned to Kedusha.

יש שטוב לשכח את העונות, ועל ידי מה שעושים כן לשם שמים כדי להתאמץ בעבודה בשמחה, ובהרחבת הדעת בתורה וחכמה, לשפר את העולם ולהוסיף אור ושמחת ד' במעשיו, ממילא, מדה כנגד מדה, נעשים הם אצל הקב"ה גם כן כביכול בגדר שכחה.

Sometimes it is good to forget ones sins. And when this is done to for the sake of heaven, to be able to strengthen ones service of heaven out of joy, and to broaden ones understanding in Torah and Wisdom, to improve the world and to enhance ones actions with light, and joy of Hashem. Automatically, measure for measure, they become in the eyes of Hashem as if they are forgotten.

Very often, we are weighed down by our past. We feel that we cannot wholeheartedly stand before Hashem proud of who we are and fulfill the Mitzvot with joy. We feel inadequate because of the mistakes we made. Self-reflection and repentance are important. However, Rav Kook is teaching us here, that at times we must simply move forward. For a moment, we should forget our past, do something we are proud of, and serve Hashem out of true joy. We should learn something new, do something kind for someone else, and, without looking back, take a step forward to become the person that we will be happy to be.

Purim is the perfect time to take this step. Yom Kippurim may be the time to reflect and look back, but Purim is the time to move forward with the immense joy that comes from new beginnings.



Purim is good (but not good enough)

Rav Yair Spitz, Menahel, Yeshivat Or Chaim

Purim is the only Chag on which we don't say Hallel. The Gemara brings three reasons for this. The first is, that we don't say Hallel on miracles that happened outside the Land of Israel. After pointing out an exception to this rule, the Gemara moves on to a second answer, that reading the Megila is equal to saying Hallel. This answer too, seems lacking, because although we know and understand that Hashem is indeed behind the Purim salvation, during the reading of the Megila itself – we are not praising (הלל) Hashem. If Hashem isn't even mentioned in the Megila, then how can its mere reading constitute praise?

The Gemara then brings its third and final answer: אבתי עבדי אחשוורוש אנן, "we were still the servants of Achashverosh". The story of the Megila ends on a sweet and sour note. Though we are thankful our enemies failed, at the end of the story – we were still in Galut, we were still subjugated to the authority of others.

The Gemara continues to explain that Hallel, on the other hand, can only truly be said when its statement of הללו ה' עבדי is true. And one cannot be a true, full servant of Hashem based on survival in Galut alone. Survival in Galut has been miraculous, no doubt, and worthy of thanks. That is why we say על הניסים. But survival in Galut is not enough for giving praise.

These three answers should not be seen as mutually exclusive. While reading the Megila, we recognize and give thanks to Hashem for the salvation and miracle of Purim, but the absence of הלל on this day serves to remind us that the miracle of Purim took place outside of Israel, and more significantly, that the celebration cannot be complete until the physical survival of Galut finds its meaning in the sovereign, independent life of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael where we can truly be עבדי ה', servants of Hashem.

I Don't Want to Volunteer for the IDF

By Josh Lehman

My name is Josh Lehman, I'm from Monsey, New York, and in two week's time I will be volunteering for the Israel Defense Forces. In light of that, I suppose the title of this article needs some explaining.

I don't want to join the Israeli Army, I really don't. I don't like the idea of taking orders, being overly physical, depriving myself of sleep, eating tuna, pushing off college, leaving my friends, leaving my family, speaking a foreign language, going to war, and quite frankly, green isn't really my color. Many don't join the army for several of the reasons just raised, and honestly they are very good reasons. Despite these setbacks my decision to go to enlist remains unwavering, and I would like to explain why that is.

I recently saw the movie "42", which portrays the life of Jackie Robinson. Robinson was one of the first ever African-American Major League Baseball players and had to overcome many adversities in his life because of the racist nature of the United States at the time. He not only succeeded as a player, but also as a model for how a discriminated man can thrive in a segregated society. There is a scene in the movie where Robinson is up at bat and the opposing coach taunts him with racist slurs from the other dugout. The taunting clearly caused Jackie a lot of distress to the point where one of his white teammates stood up for him and told off the antagonistic coach. Jackie returned to his dugout and thanked the other player, but was quickly replied to with the following response: "You're on my team, what am I supposed to do?"

When I think about the sacrifices that are made by the people of Israel to make this tiny country work, and I wonder if it's my place to step up and help out, there is

only one thought that comes to mind, "You're on my team, what am I supposed to do?" I guess you can say this entire baseball analogy was just a way of saying "Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh L'zeh" ("All Jews are responsible for one another"), but somehow those words have lost their meaning. If we Jews are really supposed to view each other as brothers, then why aren't the doors of the enlistment office flooded with Jews from all over the world looking to join. I know that if anyone's brother lived under the threats and immediate danger that the Jews in Eretz Yisrael face on a daily basis, they would do everything in their power to help in any way possible.

I suppose that's where the issue stems from; whether we really view each other as a family or not.

Very often people will ask me if the army really needs me. After all, will one more soldier really make such a difference? The truth is the army really doesn't need me, but the answer to the question lies in the upcoming holiday of Purim. Esther was sent on a mission

to save the Jewish people from the hands of Haman, and even had to risk her own life in the process. After Mordechai asked her to approach King Achashveirosh, Esther expressed concern at the danger of approaching the king uninvited. It was then that Mordechai answered with the following: If you, Esther, remain silent at this time, the rescue of the Jewish people will come from someone else. Mordechai was explaining to Esther that the Jewish people didn't need her specifically, as God has a plan to save us anyway. God's plan will take place with you or without you. Your job, Esther, is to decide whether or not you want to be a part of that plan.

We are given opportunities by God to do amazing things with our lives. Whether or not we want to accept those opportunities is left for us to decide. The ability to fight and defend the Jewish people is one of the most amazing privileges that we have ever been given as a people. To choose to take part in such a privilege is our decision, because either way God has an agenda. I am choosing to be an active participant in the current stage of God's plan for His people, and if that requires me to speak Hebrew and eat tuna, so be it.

Josh Lehman was born and raised in New York. He learnt in Yeshivat Hakotel in Jerusalem and joined the Kfir unit of the IDF last March.

KOLOT HAMIZRACH

The עליון חגים of Mizrachi Canada

www.mizrachi.ca | mizrachi@mizrachi.ca | 416-630-9266

Like us on Facebook: [/mizrachicanada](https://www.facebook.com/mizrachicanada) | Twitter: [@mizrachicanada](https://twitter.com/mizrachicanada)

OUR PARTNERS

BNEI AKIVA OF TORONTO, CAMP MOSHAVA ENNISMORE, MOSHAVA BA'IR TORONTO,
BNEI AKIVA SCHOOLS, EMUNAH CANADA, YU/TORAH MITZION BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

DESIGN BY DANIEL SAFRAN