

The celebration that **NEVER ENDS**



What sets Purim apart from all the other holidays? | BY ROBERT SUSSMAN

FOR LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF YEARS, WE HAVE recounted each year at the Pesach seder the incredible open miracles that Hashem did for us when He took us out from Egypt. In fact, one of the paragraphs that comprises the Shema even serves to recall the exodus from Egypt more frequently for us than just annually – twice daily. Even the very first mitzvah of the Ten Commandments does not simply declare that Hashem is our G-d, but quite notably adds that He took us out of the land of Egypt. Could there be any greater miracles than those that Hashem performed when He

took us out of from that endless, terrible, and brutal Egyptian exile?

Our Sages answer, rather remarkably: Yes!

EVEN GREATER THAN THE MIRACLES DURING THE EXODUS

There will come a time in the not too distant future when Hashem will reveal Himself to the entire world, when He and His name will be one¹, and He will gather the Jewish people from the four corners of the earth where we have been scattered for millennia and return us to the land of Israel. So great will the miracles involved in this pro-

cess be that they will actually, by sake of comparison, dwarf those miracles that took place during the process of the exodus from Egypt. This doesn't mean that we will no longer recall the exodus from Egypt, but rather that its recollection will become secondary in importance when compared to that of the miracles that will take place during that final redemption.² So too, all of the moadim (appointed festivals) that commemorate the exodus – Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot – will likewise take on a diminished importance in comparison to whatever day(s) will be established to commemorate the final redemption.

Although the Chumash, aka the Five Books of Moses, will never be superseded, the same cannot be said for the other



books of the Hebrew Bible (Tanach): the Nevi'im (the Prophets) and the Kesuvim (the Writings), as the revelations contained within these books will, likewise, be insignificant in contrast to the revelations that will take place in the future – with, however, one very notable exception: Megillas Esther.³

WHAT SETS MEGILLAS ESTHER APART?

So, we need to try and understand what is so special about Megillas Esther that it will still matter in the future, that Purim will somehow still be worthy of celebrating. And it's especially difficult to understand what was so special about the miracles of Purim in comparison to the miracles that took place in Egypt, as our Sages teach that even a maidservant who was present at the splitting of the sea saw things that the greatest of the prophets did not merit to see. The revelation of G-d in the world and His ability to deviate from the laws of nature at will also serves as the foundation of our faith, so, again, it's hard to understand how the importance of the miracles of the exodus will somehow be diminished in the future.

THERE'S MIRACLES...AND THEN THERE'S MIRACLES

For starters, the miracles of Purim differed greatly from those of the exodus. The miracles that took place during the exodus were open and evident; there was simply no mistaking “the finger of G-d.”⁴ The miracles of Purim, on the other hand, were just the opposite, neither clear nor certain, hidden within the seemingly natural course of events, within history itself, without any noticeable deviations.

When a king makes a festive meal, it can be expected that, like Achashverosh, he'll call for his wife, the queen, to join him at it. And, when that queen refuses to come, as Vashti did, it's also natural that a king could become so angry over the embarrassment that his queen has caused him by her refusal that he'll have her killed. So too, that king could choose a new queen, even one who fails to reveal to him her nationality, as was the case with Esther. And, so

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too, it happens that those selected to guard a king, like Bigsan and Seresh, will sometimes plot a coup against that king, but be tripped up in their conspiracy, found out, and executed. Viewed in isolation, there was nothing unusual about any of these events – or any of the other seemingly insignificant events from the story of Purim – none of which deviated from the natural order of things in the slightest. There was simply nothing remarkable about any of the events of Purim that would make them stand out and cause people to take notice of them.

HOW MIRACLES WORK

Just as there is an order to the way in which the natural world is conducted and a structure within which it operates, so too there is an order and structure to the way in which miracles are conducted. Miracles don't happen by accident, nor do they, contrary to how it might sometimes erroneously appear to us, come about as solutions to situations that would seemingly be impossible to solve through natural means. Instead, there is incredible precision to the way that miracles are carried out – the times, the places, the situations.

Hashem planned, from the very beginning of Creation, all of the laws governing nature and all of the laws governing the miracles that He would use in the future as needed. In fact, our Sages teach⁵ that G-d stipulated with each and every part of creation, which He made during the six days of creation, at the time of each part's cre-

ation regarding any deviations that would take place in those parts throughout history. In other words, all of the open miracles that we have experienced and will experience were actually built into the very creation of the world, decreed in advance and firmly established from the beginning – at such-and-such a time, in such-and-such a place, such-and-such will happen – like an incredibly choreographed dance routine. And, because G-d is the “choreographer” – so to speak – nothing ever misses its mark.

Just to give a few well-known examples, during those six days of creation, Hashem, among a host of other things: commanded the sea to split, so that the Jewish people could walk through it on dry land; the sun and the moon to remain still for Yehoshua; the lions not to harm Daniel; the large fish to vomit out Yonah; etc., etc. – each event prescribed in advance to transpire precisely when and where dictated.

HIDDEN VS OPEN

When it comes to hidden miracles, Hashem encompasses all of the events within natural occurrences, within the framework of natural events themselves without any change at all – which is not the case with how He conducts things when it comes to open miracles, where He actually changes the laws of Creation.

But, the truth is that, just as with open miracles, hidden miracles were also planned by Hashem from the very beginning of Creation. What makes hidden miracles that much greater than open ones is

that Hashem surrounds all of the events of a hidden miracle within the framework of the natural world itself, without any sort of appearance of deviation or breaking of the laws by which the natural world operates – thereby demonstrating His utter and complete mastery over the world, not to mention His great wisdom at coordinating a mind-boggling number of details. Hashem's ability to work within the laws of nature – to allow His hands to be "tied" – so to speak – and operate within fixed boundaries and laws – demonstrates even more clearly just how powerful He is. Granted, it takes tremendous power to break the rules, but it takes even greater power and greater wisdom to work within their strict confines.

WHAT SETS PURIM APART

What sets Purim apart from Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot is the fact that the miracles that transpired throughout the events of Purim were hidden. By using nature itself to carry out His will, Hashem caused His mastery over the world to be even more evident than even the open miracles connected to and commemorated by the mo'adim. Although easy to deny when looked at individually, joining all the individual events that comprised the Purim story together, each event linked to the next like interwoven rings in a long chain, we can clearly see and understand the miracle and the obvious Hand behind it all. The fact that it was all hidden in plain sight only makes it all the greater. If we took the frames of a movie and viewed each in isolation, we would fail to appreciate how the frames connected with each other or to appreciate the very subtle, almost imperceptible, movements that took place from one frame to the next – all of which, when connected together and viewed as a whole and in quick succession, tell a very different story than any individual frame could possibly convey.

The events of the Purim story took place over a period of nine years, from the third year of Achashverosh's reign until the twelfth year of his reign. When all of these events are read aloud at one time, it becomes obvious how each event is connected with the others, both before and after it – but, at the time that any single event actually transpired, no one could have possibly guessed or understood its connection to any of the others. No one could understand how a wicked king could take the righteous Esther into his palace to be his queen. No one could understand the evil decrees of the wicked Haman. No one could understand why Mordechai would not bow to Haman. No one could understand why Esther invited Haman to dine with the king. And so each person stood befuddled and surprised throughout that entire period of time regarding each and every event, unable to recognise the puzzle pieces lying

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before him, let alone to assemble them and understand how they all fit together so perfectly. There was no deviation in the natural order of things, no open miracles to recognise and take note of.

HIDDEN AND REVEALED

Megillas Esther – the title by which we refer to this book of the Hebrew Bible – is comprised of two words that represent opposing ideas. On the one hand, the Megilla is *hester*, ie. hidden. But, on the other hand, it is a *Megilla*, ie. it reveals, in this case, it reveals to us the salvation of Hashem that took place in all its detail. The ultimate lesson of the Megilla is that Hashem's salvation can come about even within the great darkness of our exile. Even right now, every moment in time sees events unfolding that will eventually lead to our final salvation, just as they did in the Megilla.

The Megilla is called by our Sages an *igeres* – a letter. This same root, however, can also mean “collection”. The Megilla “collects” all of the events of Purim and *halacha* (Jewish law) even requires⁶ that we quite literally and physically “spread out” the Megilla at the time that we read it on Purim (take note this year of how the Megilla gets entirely unrolled and then folded up in order to read from it) – in order to see at a glance how all of the events were tied together, this one to that one, including the evil acts – and how they all led to our salvation. Interestingly enough, this is also why the *halacha* says that if a person read the entire Megilla, but did so backwards, he has not fulfilled his obligation regarding its reading. All of the events of the Megilla were arranged in an incredible order – each event the reason or cause for another event – all of which, when taken together, led to our salvation. By reading them in the correct order, we see the incredible Hand of Hashem woven throughout these many seemingly separate and disparate events. But, reading it backwards, one fails to see and appreciate the wondrous guidance of Hashem behind these events, how He used the framework

of nature to bring about our deliverance from the hand of Haman.

HASHEM INCORPORATES EVIL

The Ramchal explains that Hashem's Hand is hidden in every event, including events that we think are bad and evil things which we might think are somehow even contrary to His will. The fact is that we do not have the ability to do things in opposition to the will of Hashem. This is one of the major differences from other religions regarding how we see, for example, evil and the role of the Satan, the accusing angel, who Christians see as a “fallen angel”, a force that stands in opposition to G-d, defying His will. This is a common error, to think that Hashem wills some things, but not others.

Evil itself – against the very will of those who choose to do evil – is used according to the plan of Hashem. Evil was created like a single screw that exists inside a gigantic machine. The screw has no function or use outside of that machine. In other words, it's not a stand-alone device with its own purpose, but simply one small, insignificant part of an incredibly large and complex contraption in which it gets subsumed. It cannot help but serve the machine in which it has been inserted.

Everything is conducted according to a prescribed order, meaning that there is nothing haphazard or accidental, but only in the end can we see and understand how suffering can transform into deliverance and salvation. We sometimes think that we see Hashem's Hand in events, but this won't compare to the depth and clarity with which we'll be able to see and understand those events at the conclusion of the story, just as was the case with the story of Purim.

Haman, who was responsible for giving the advice to Achashverosh to kill Vashti, caused – as a result of his own advice – Esther to be chosen as the queen. And, in the end, it was Esther who would orchestrate Haman's downfall. Haman threw lots to determine on which day the Jews should be destroyed, and, on the very date that had been selected by his lottery, that day became not the date of our destruction, but the date of our salvation – a date commemorated each year thereafter in celebration and thanksgiving. Haman himself prepared the gallows on which he intended to hang Mordechai, and, instead, it was he who wound up being hanged on those very gallows. So, we can see with certainty how within this great hiddenness comes salvation and we can understand how even evil can be used by Hashem to help bring about that salvation.

WHY WILL PURIM LAST?

The common denominator between the final and ultimate revelation of Hashem that will take place in the future and the revelation of the miracle of Purim is that we will understand how evil itself can be used as a means to bring about the revelation of the oneness of Hashem in this world – and how everything that happens is according to His will, that despite the fact that acts are evil, they can, ultimately, serve to reveal Hashem in this world. To take what is for our generation the most extreme example possible: even the Final Solution, for all of its unspeakable evil, horror, and devastation, ultimately leads to the Final Salvation.

As Hashem explained⁷ to Moshe, we cannot understand Hashem's ways going forward (ie. at the time an event takes place) because we are completely oblivious to what any given event means and

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the incredibly diverse, complex, and infinitesimally small connections that exist between what came before it and what will come after it. It's only after the fact, in retrospect, when we can see everything in context and all the links that existed between events. The relationship between the Purim story and story of the final redemption is one of micro to macro. The Purim story represents on a smaller scale the way in which the events of history play out precisely according to a script that has been dictated by Hashem, incorporating even acts that are evil and those that are seemingly contrary to His will, to bring about the ending to the story that He decreed long ago from the very beginning.

Within the hester, the darkness or hiddenness, of natural events, without any deviation from the laws of nature, the singularity of Hashem will ultimately be revealed to the world. Purim shows us how Hashem can even use evil itself in order to do His will and bring about our deliverance and salvation through it – and how everything is ultimately for the good, even though we cannot see it in the present, but only retrospectively at the end of the story. This is why the miracle of Purim and its annual celebration will continue to hold a prominent place even after the final redemption has taken place.

Adapted from a sicha by the Sifsei Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, ztz"l. 



¹Presently, Hashem's name is spelled one way (ie Yud kay vav kay), but pronounced as Ado-nai.

²See Brachos 12b

³See Talmud Yerushalmi Megilla 1:5

⁴See Shemos 8:15

⁵See Bereishis Rabah 5:5

⁶See Shulchan Aruch OC 690:17

⁷Shemos 33:20, 23

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