

Purim: Behind the Scenes

By: Dr. Leah Adams

Purim is a great holiday for psychologically oriented articles. There are so many lessons having to do with our personal abilities and challenges, our relationships with others, our resilience in time of tragedy and even how we define happiness. As we know, many of the lessons of Purim are hidden behind and between the text of the Megillah. The ideas that follow are personal thoughts sparked by the mystery.

We are so used to the glamorous palace lifestyle of Mordechai and Esther later in the Megillah, that we almost forget their beginnings, an orphaned girl being raised by her relative. They were Exiles from the Promised Land. What promise did they think the future held? Esther then gets scooped up by the king's guards and taken, against her will, to the palace. We know the end of the story and so it is easy for us to overlook these initial challenges. The amazing thing about Mordechai and Esther is that they, even in the midst of these challenges used their unequivocal faith in Hashem to rise above what appears to be hopeless situations. We spoke in the last article about the personal strength we can acquire by allying ourselves with Hashem. Here, in the Megillah, we see this played out live. Rather than viewing her kidnapping as another slap, Mordechai and Esther are able to strengthen themselves with the idea that Hashem has a plan. In fact, Esther was in the palace for five years before the significance of her role became evident!

How often do we get frustrated about a certain play of events only to realize later that the particular incident that aggravated us was a necessary building brick to a different, necessary event? Let's create an example that we can relate to. We lose our job which is a seemingly disastrous event. This prompts us to go job hunting and take a different job. One day an old friend comes in to the new place and we are able to help them specifically because we have this job! If we could only have Mordechai and Esther's view even when we first lose the job, we could save ourselves a lot of aggravation. Actually living this

way is obviously not as easy as writing about it here, but it gives us food for thought.

On the opposite extreme of Esther maintaining her Faith in the face of orphanhood, is the way in which she maintains her faith even in the face of unbounded wealth. Once Queen, she still remembers the King of the Universe. Her selflessness in the shadow of Haman and his evil plan is incredibly powerful. It is specifically her newfound opportunity for pampered royalty that makes this selflessness so amazing. While personal status can lead a person to be conceited, Esther humbles herself even more. It is specifically because she does not seek her own aggrandizement that she is recognized as great. In my own personal life I find that the people that are seen as special are exactly the ones who shun the public accolades. By recognizing that their talents are a gift from Above, they are able to maintain a sense of happiness just by using these gifts properly, and do not need the recognition of others to feel important. Think of examples from your own life. Have you ever attended an affair where the work was shared by two co-chairmen? We often respect the one who works hard and then steps back, allowing the other to shine.

Near the end of the Megillah we are told, Layehudim Haysa Orah Visimcha Visason Viykar. To the Jews there was light and happiness. Again, if we remind ourselves of all of the details of the Megillah, we would think that the Jews would have been happy partying at the beginning of the Megillah. They were not all as capable as Mordechai to recognize the “writing on the wall” so the drinking and food should have been associated with happiness. Yet, this purely materialistic pursuit is not described in those terms. At the beginning of the Megillah, when the Jews do not fully acknowledge the role of Hashem and Hashgachah Pratis in their lives, they do not have real satisfaction. It is only later, once the threat to their existence has become more obvious, do they rejoice in the knowledge of the role Hashem plays. Again, let’s look at examples from our own lives to see how this concept rings true to this day. A simple example is this: Our spouse is always the one to buy the milk for morning coffee. We make our coffee every morning without even thinking about the effort involved. One morning we realize, (to our horror) that there is no milk (insert your own reason here)! That evening our

spouse buys milk. The next morning, having experienced the disappointment the morning before, we suddenly have a new appreciation for our spouse and happiness with our coffee!

So, as we drink our coffee and other festive libations this Purim hidden behind our masks (I hope you are all enjoying the costumes from the Gemach) let us remember to be joyous with the mysterious lives that Hashem has orchestrated for us.

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