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Terumah (Exodus 25 - 27)

GOOD MORNING! We are now in the Hebrew month of Adar, a month associated with joy. It is also the month in which the miracle of Purim occurred, some 2,500 year ago, when the Jewish people were saved from annihilation at the hands of the wicked Haman – an Amelekite descendant and mortal enemy of the Jewish nation.

Purim is a holiday that is really, really enjoyed by almost everyone (as we will explain next week, it is a day of brotherhood and gift giving and it is a *mitzvah* to have a festive meal; there is much revelry with the requisite eating and imbibing of alcoholic beverages). The custom for both adults and children is to “dress up” in all sorts of costumes and go from house to house spreading joy and giving gifts of delicious foods and wines.

Sadly, this has led some to view Purim as a “Jewish Halloween” of sorts – a terrible sentiment reflecting a superficial understanding of the holiday. (Though this does remind me of the woman who decided she was going to throw a Cinderella themed Purim party for her teenage daughter and her classmates. As she explained; “I am going to have them dress in old clothes and come to the house and do all the laundry and ironing and then scrub the floors and wash the dishes.”)

In truth, Purim is often misunderstood and generally seen as a carefree distraction a month before the intensity of Passover. This is a mistake. Purim is in fact a MAJOR Jewish holiday – one that imbues the entire month of Adar with the obligation of increasing one’s joy.

According to Jewish tradition, Purim is the one and only holiday that will still be celebrated at the “End of Days” – a time when all the other Jewish holidays will cease to exist. Obviously, there is a deep meaning to all that transpired on Purim and there is a necessity to celebrate and commemorate it forever. God willing, we will discuss that remarkable point in next week’s column. (Because it is a holiday of great significance we will discuss some elements this week and some elements next week.)

To begin, here is a little background on this very special holiday.

Q & A: WHAT IS PURIM AND HOW DO WE CELEBRATE IT?

The story of Purim takes place in ancient Persia, some seventy years after the destruction of the first *Beis Hamikdosh* – the holy temple in Jerusalem. As mentioned, Haman hated the Jewish people and he conspired with King Achashverosh (head of the Persian monarchy which, at the time, ruled most of the known world – he is identified in world history as King Xerxes) to utterly annihilate the Jewish people from all corners of the kingdom.

The events surrounding the miraculous salvation of the Jewish nation through the hands of Queen Esther, with the guidance of Mordechai (who was the leader of the generation and also happened to be her uncle), are recounted in detail in the Book of Esther.

The holiday derives its name from the word “*pur*,” which in Persian which means “lots” – as in, “Haman cast lots for the most ‘auspicious’ date to kill the Jews.” The date fell out on the 13th of Adar. The events of that date turned a day of planned destruction into a day of victory and joy. We

celebrate Purim on the 14th of Adar for “they gained relief on the fourteenth, which they made a day of feasting and gladness” ([Esther 9:17](#)).

The Talmud (*Ta’anit* 29a) makes a puzzling statement regarding the festive atmosphere of the month of Adar: “Just as we reduce our joy when the month of Av arrives, we likewise enjoined to increase our joy when Adar arrives.”

In the month of Av, we mourn the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and our expulsion from the Land of Israel. Consequently, when the month of Av begins, we are expected to adopt a more somber attitude and to decrease our involvement in joyous activities. Adar, meanwhile, is a month of joy, the month when we celebrate our salvation from Haman’s evil decree. Because of the joyous nature of the month, we increase our happiness as soon as the month begins.

All of this is understandable, except for one point: Why does the Talmud imply that there is a connection between the decrease in joy during Av and the increase in Adar? While we mourn the Temple’s destruction in Av and we celebrate the Purim miracle in Adar, there does not seem to be any compelling connection between these two events. Yet the Talmud implies a connection by stating that just as we decrease our happiness in Av, we increase it in Adar. What is the common factor between the two months?

Throughout the Book of Esther there are a series of events that seem disparate and unconnected, but seen as a whole they paint a coordinated path that led to the salvation of the Jewish People. These events transpire before Haman ever plotted to wipe out the Jewish nation. Regarding this The Talmud states (*Megillah* 13a): “God never brings a disease without first preparing the cure.”

This is a remarkable statement. While it’s true that the Almighty is the guiding hand that ultimately provides salvation for the Jewish nation, He is also the “villain” who “brought the disease” in the first place. Just as a

parents, out of love, punish their children in order to get them to improve their ways, grow, and succeed, so too the Almighty does that for His children.

This is the message conveyed by the fact that Hashem creates the “cure” before the “disease.” By doing so, Hashem reveals that it is He Who brings about every calamity, and the purpose of the calamity is to change us. Sometimes, the only way to motivate a person to improve himself is to shake him out of his complacency with suffering; the decree of annihilation was necessary in order to prompt the Jewish people to make the changes they needed to make.

Imagine that two people were diagnosed with different forms of cancer; one was told that no cure existed for his illness, while the other was told that his form of the disease is often successfully treated. If a cure is miraculously discovered for the first patient’s illness in time to save his life, then both will be equally healthy once again; the difference between them lies only in the amount of emotional trauma they will suffer during their periods of illness. The patient who is told that his disease is curable will be able to keep his spirits up, while the other patient, who is led to believe that he is doomed to die, will be much more traumatized.

Likewise, knowing that God has prepared a cure allows us to persevere when times are difficult. Even when we are facing the most difficult circumstances we have the knowledge that there is a cure out there; we only need to find it and take our medicine, as it were.

This is the connection between the destruction of the Temple in Av and the miracle of Purim in Adar. They are both sides of the same coin; the expression of love that God has for His children. The destruction was the Almighty’s way of telling us, much like a parent, that we must change our ways in order to succeed and have a meaningful life. While we mourn what we have lost, we must also understand that it is all from the Almighty because he cares about us.

So too in Adar; once the Jewish people decided to repent and return to their roots, events unfolded showing that God planned the ultimate redemption from the outset. The salvation of Purim was an expression of the Almighty's love for us. But so was the decree for our annihilation. We just had to take a step in the right direction so that the outcome would be appropriate to our spiritual state.

This duality is further expressed in a very enigmatic statement from the Talmud. On Purim one is supposed to drink to the point that "one is unaware of whether Mordechai is to be blessed and Haman is to be cursed or vice versa." What does that mean? What is the point of confusing the heroes and villains of the story? The answer is that we must come to the realization that both Haman and Mordechai were acting as agents of the Almighty – but it is He who is actually guiding it all.

Never has this lesson been more relevant for this generation. As the world suffers terribly, through disease, loss of life, isolation, loss of jobs and economic hardships, we must try to understand that the world is being guided by our Heavenly Father – one who only wants what is best for His children. But it is up to us to change ourselves so that the outcome is appropriate for who we are.

We must ask ourselves; what are we to learn from all of this? How can I use these lessons to improve who I am as a person, as a community, as a nation? When we think in this way we will begin to internalize some of what the Almighty is trying to convey and may we merit a speedy redemption from these difficult times. Amen.



TORAH PORTION OF THE WEEK

Terumah, Exodus 25:1 - 27:19

This week's Torah reading is an architect's or interior designer's dream portion. It begins with the Almighty commanding Moses to tell the Jewish people to donate the materials necessary for the construction of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary.

The Torah continues with the details for constructing the Ark, the Table, the Menorah, the Tabernacle (the central area of worship containing the Ark, the Menorah, the Incense Altar, and the Table), the Beams composing the walls of the Tabernacle, the Cloth partition (separating the Holy of Holies where the Ark rested from the remaining Sanctuary part of the Tabernacle), the Altar and the Enclosure for the Tabernacle (surrounding curtains forming a rectangle within which was approximately 15x larger than the Tabernacle)

“ Quote of the Week ”

On Purim we don't drink alcohol, we drink distilled spirits. We aren't alcoholics, we are spiritual!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

