

The Strange Miracle of Purim      by Rabbi Reuven Mann

The Jewish people are a unique entity. One manifestation of this is the attitude they displayed toward accepting the Torah. The Rabbis say that G-d offered His Revelation to various other nations. Yet, after inquiring as to its prohibitions they said, "thanks, but no thanks."

The Jews reacted differently. Without hesitation, they unanimously proclaimed, "We will do and we will listen."

The Talmud maintains that this reaction was not entirely voluntary. The Rabbis saw an indication of "hesitation" in the verse that states, "And they stood at the base of the mountain." According to them, this teaches that Hashem held the mountain over them and said, "If you accept the Torah, it will be fine but, if not, this will be your burial place."

These words are not intended literally for, if so, they would contradict the plain sense of the text that the Jews accepted the Torah willingly. The Rabbis use this type of literary device to make certain points. The idea they are expressing here is that a certain element of coercion was necessary to coax the Jews to enter the Covenant.

Nevertheless, the Rabbis assert that on Purim the Jews reaccepted the Torah, out of love. More specifically, says Rashi, because of their love of the miracle that was wrought for them.

On the surface, this notion is difficult. The miracles the Jews experienced prior to Sinai, such as the ten plagues which devastated Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the manna seem to be of much greater magnitude than the events of Purim.

In fact, one would be hard put to pinpoint a specific miracle in the Megillah narrative. True, things worked out very fortuitously for the Jews, but one could argue that the breathtaking turn of fortune took place in a completely natural manner.

To resolve this problem, we must recognize that there are two types of miracles. The first involves a supernatural event that overrides the laws of nature, like the staff of Moshe turning into a snake.

The second category is "hidden miracles," where something totally out of the ordinary, and regarded as "impossible," nevertheless occurs. An example would be where a ragtag band of fighters defeats an army of overwhelmingly superior numbers and power.

There is no specific happening that contradicts the laws of nature. However, things come together in the most unusual manner and produce the most unexpected result. It can all be explained as "amazing" circumstances. But it is also possible that Hashem masterminded the otherwise inexplicable outcome.

The salvation of the Jews on Purim resulted from a brilliantly contrived and executed strategy formulated by Mordechai and Esther. With great courage, the Queen dramatically appeared, uninvited, in the inner courtyard of the King, which put her life at risk.

She boldly requested that the King and Haman come to a party she had prepared for them. At the party, the King, whose curiosity was aroused, asked her to reveal what it was that she desired.

Inexplicably, she held him at bay and beseeched him to come with Haman to a second party she would arrange on the morrow, at which she would reveal what was on her mind.

Esther had managed to arouse deep-seated emotions in the King. Many strange things happened on that night. The King couldn't sleep, and in perusing the palace records, "discovered" that Mordechai had not been rewarded for saving his life from would be assassins. At that exact moment, Haman arrived to secure permission for Mordechai's immediate execution.

This was the beginning of the end for Haman. In carrying out the King's tribute to Mordechai, he suffered the greatest humiliation of his life and was dragged to the Queen's second party in a state of extreme shock.

The stage was set. Esther revealed that it was her nation that had been marked for destruction by a disloyal and cruel enemy. When asked to identify the villain she firmly said; "An adversary and an enemy! This wicked Haman!" She pleaded that the King take action to save her and her people.

The King's mood was conducive to her imploring. He no longer felt any loyalty to Haman. In a fit of great anger, he accepted Charvonah's suggestion that Haman be hanged on the tree he had "prepared" for Mordechai.

The miracle was great but hidden. It came about through a unique combination of human action and Divine intervention. Hashem arranged the factors that enabled Mordechai's and Esther's plans to come to fruition.

Rabbi Israel Chait has explained that the story of Purim demonstrates the superiority of the Torah way of life. The Jews of that time compared the wisdom and idealism of Mordechai and Esther to the gross materialism and insatiable egotism of King Achashverosh and Haman. This contrast allowed them to discern how Torah wisdom perfects a person and brings him into the sphere of Divine Providence.

The miracle of Purim caused the Jews to examine their relationship to Torah and to reestablish it on the basis of love. May we merit to follow their path and be worthy of Hashem's salvation.

Shabbat shalom and chag Purim sameach.