

Why Miracles Happen

By Rabbi Reuven Mann

The story of Purim recounts the great miracle of salvation that the Jews of Persia experienced in ancient times. All of the Jews, men, women and children were marked for destruction by their enemies on a single day. This was even worse than the threat to Jewish existence which was posed by Nazi Germany.

Hitler could not even dream of annihilating his sworn enemy in just a day. It took him a few years to achieve the number of six million slain. And he had to do his best to keep it secret. Haman had dominion over virtually all of the Jews of that time and he had no need to act surreptitiously. He sent out letters to all the provinces alerting the Jew haters to arm and prepare to destroy all their victims on the thirteenth of the month of Adar.

In terms of the existential danger faced by the Jews, Purim and the Holocaust were strikingly similar happenings. The major difference was the outcome. We celebrate Purim because "*VeNahapoch Hu*" (the situation was completely overturned), and it was the Jews who emerged victorious over their enemies.

Sadly, there was no such salvation in the Holocaust. No one intervened to destroy Hitler and rescue the Jews. The Holocaust would have kept going but was only terminated when the Allies advancing from the West and East crushed the Third Reich.

It is important to look deeply into the Megillah to understand what factors were responsible for the miracle of salvation. It would appear that the greatness of the Jewish leaders, Mordechai and Esther was extremely consequential.

Mordechai could be viewed as somehow responsible for the calamity which befell his People, but his provocative behavior was a measure of his greatness. He adamantly refused to conform to the order of the King that everyone must prostrate themselves before Haman. Haman could not abide this offense to his ego and sought revenge not just against Mordechai but the entire nation of which he was a part.

Judaism, emphatically asserts, that it is mandatory to demonstrate respect for the rulers of one's country. In fact, it is a Rabbinic tradition that Moshe was commanded to display honor to Pharaoh when appearing before him. So it is difficult to comprehend why Mordechai abstained from bowing to Haman.

The answer is to be found in the severe Jewish prohibition against idol-worship. Rabbi Israel Chait explained that Haman's self-deification was a form of idolatry and that assenting to it would be a desecration of Hashem's Name, which a Jew would have to resist at the pain of death.

Mordechai's sanctification of G-d's Name constituted a great merit for the entire Jewish People for it is our mission to glorify Hashem in the eyes of the world. But Mordechai was active on the practical

front as well. He believed that one may not rely on miracles and therefore he “tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes. He went out into the midst of the city, and cried loudly and bitterly.” He knew that he had to get the attention of Esther and mobilize her to use her position as Queen to convince Achashverosh to rescind the evil decree.

He also insisted that Esther come before the King unannounced thereby courting execution. Rabbi Chait explained that this was because the ordinary rules of diplomatic procedure could not be adhered to when dealing with a sadistic and merciless executioner of Hitlerite proportions. She needed to put her life at risk in order to demonstrate to the King how vital this matter was in her eyes.

Esther was a not just the niece of Mordechai, but was a great personality in her own right. She did not follow the advice of Mordechai to merely beg and plead for her nation before the King. This crisis demanded a different approach. So she independently devised a plan of action which aroused the suspicions of the King concerning Haman and which manipulated Haman into displaying his true inner intentions.

Esther clearly recognized the spiritual dimensions of the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews. She understood that the nation had sinned and would have to return to Hashem in order to have Him on their side. Without divine assistance, it would be virtually impossible to overcome the array of forces that were stacked against them.

Accordingly, she summoned the Jews to join her in three days of introspection, repentance and fasting. It was in that sober and divinely inspired state of mind that she thought through all of the issues confronting her and formulated the ideas that would save the day. She separated herself from the instructions of her uncle, Mordechai, and came up with a counter-intuitive and highly original strategy.

Esther’s plan required great courage, fortitude and trust in the All-Mighty. And it was effective as things started happening almost immediately. “On that night the sleep of the King was disturbed” and he requested that the chronicles of the kingdom be read to him. For some unknown reason the page was turned to the account of Bigsan and Seresh whose plot to kill the King had been foiled by Mordechai the Jew. And yet Haman had not seen fit to reward him!

That was only the beginning of a night of “strange happenings” in which the King’s fascination with Haman was transformed into suspicion and finally loathing. At the second party it only remained for Esther to deliver the *coup de gras* and Haman was hanged on the very tree he had prepared for Mordechai. Verily, the *Yeshuat Hashem* (salvation of G-d) is “as the blink of an eye.”

The miracles of Purim were categorically different from those that were performed in Egypt and the wilderness. Those were exclusively attributable to the awesome might of Hashem in subduing all the forces of nature. But in the case of Purim, man played an essential role in triggering the “concealed” wonders. The laws of nature remained intact but the plans of righteous people were brought to fruition by the One who controls all of the elements and creatures in the world He has created.

The story of Purim reminds us of how important the role of man is in confronting crises. The Jew must always be mindful of his primary mission of *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of Hashem) and be

prepared to sacrifice everything in order to fulfill it. And he can never afford to be passive but must actively strive with all of his energy and resources to bring about the results that are required. Then with the proper *Teshuva* and prayer he may trust that Hashem will come to his assistance. And when that happens no force on earth can stand in his way.

Shabbat Shalom v'Chag Purim Sameach!

Dear Friends,

In this time of social isolation, we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online. But that can only take you so far.

Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <https://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <https://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <https://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am *especially interested* in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.