

# Man's Role in Miracles

Rabbi Reuven Mann

The Book of Esther describes the great wonder of salvation, which we celebrate on Purim. However, the miracle by which the Jews were saved from their enemies was different from the ones that were experienced in Egypt and the wilderness. In the Megillah the deliverance was achieved as a result of human action, most significantly that of Esther. It is very worthwhile to study this Book carefully, for it contains a great deal of insight into the human condition.

The danger faced by the Jews was nothing short of total annihilation, “children and women on one day”. Haman’s genocidal ambition was more lethal than Hitler’s which could only be implemented over the course of years. He had no need for secrecy and, indeed, the orders for the Jew-killers to be ready to act on the thirteenth of Adar were publicized almost a full year in advance. Haman could count on many “willing executioners” who were ready to spring into action and annihilate the Jews. On one day.

In a sense, the case could be made to place the blame on Mordechai. His refusal to bow before Haman triggered the burning anger which resulted in his decision to destroy the Jewish People. Why did Mordechai refuse to bow? At the very least, he should have endeavored to remove himself from the path of Haman so that he would not see him and be unobligated to bow.

The matter can only be understood from the standpoint of the Torah’s attitude to idolatry. The Rambam states that the overarching objective of the entire Torah is to uproot idol worship from the world so that mankind can recognize and serve the true G-d. When it comes to the sin of *Avodah Zara* (idolatry) there may be no leeway, even if one’s life is at stake. The Jew must be ready at all times to sacrifice his life, if need be, in order to renounce false gods.

Our father Avraham publicly instructed mankind to relinquish their mistaken religions and recognize Hashem, in spite of the fact that this activity resulted in his being sentenced to death. And the Jews openly set aside a sheep, the deity of Egypt, which they proceeded to slaughter on the eve of the Exodus. This in spite of the fact that Moshe had refused Pharaoh’s offer to allow the Jews to worship Hashem in Egypt by saying; “It is not proper to do so, for we will offer the deity of Egypt to Hashem, our G-d— behold if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt in their sight, will they not stone us? (Shemot 8:22)”

Yet when Hashem commanded them to sacrifice the sheep for the *Korban Pesach* (Pesach offering) they fully complied without fear of the consequences. That, I believe, explains the behavior of Mordechai. Haman the Amalekite attributed divinity to himself in the same manner that the Nazis regarded themselves as the super-race, and thus, Mordechai reasoned, bowing down to him would be an act of idolatry. He couldn’t give his assent to the idolization of man. It was his and the Jewish People’s mission to completely reject any and all forms of idol worship, even if it placed their very existence in jeopardy.

After the decree of annihilation was publicized, Mordechai did all he could to thwart it. He turned to Queen Esther and urged her to prostrate herself before the King and plead for her nation. At first, she demurred, citing the danger involved in a sudden uninvited appearance before Achashveirosh which could trigger the death penalty. What good would it do if she was executed for a breach of protocol? How would that contribute to the cause of Jewish survival?

But Mordechai wouldn't buy that. He insisted that this was no ordinary situation, and she needed to take risks in order to gain the attention of the King. This was not a time for business as usual. Moreover, he implied that it was Hashem that had placed her in this position for just such an occasion.

Esther accepted the rebuke of Mordechai. However, she did not just follow his orders. In fact, she went through a spiritual transformation and emerged as a courageous, fearless leader. She instructed Mordechai to gather all the Jews in Shushan to join her and her maidens in a fast of three days and nights, after which (still in her fasting state) she would appear before Achashvierosh without any fear for her own life; "and if I am to perish, I shall perish. (Esther 4:16)" Esther was now in charge and making the decisions; "And Mordechai went about and did *everything* that Esther had *commanded*. (Esther 4:17)"

What is the meaning of "everything that Esther commanded?" A similar term is used in describing the disagreement between Avraham and Sarah as to whether Hagar and Yishmael should be driven from Avraham's home. "The matter greatly distressed Avraham regarding his son". In response, Hashem told him, "Listen to *everything* that Sarah tells you ..." Why?, say the Rabbis, because, in these matters, she is guided by the "Holy Spirit". And, I believe the matter is the same over here. Once Esther accepted her Divine responsibility, she was infused with a Holy Spirit of wisdom and insight and Mordechai agreed to do all that she instructed.

Certain things became clear to Esther during her three days of fasting and introspection. She could not just go and plead with the King, as Mordechai urged. This would be futile. Before she could request Achashveirosh to rescind the decrees of Haman, she had to cause the King to recognize Haman for the evil, self-serving manipulator that he was.

That is why, upon being granted an audience with her husband, she asked that he and Haman come to a party that she was hosting for just them. This alone had to arouse the wonder and imagination of the King. And then at the party, when he urged that she express her desire, she remained coy and only asked that the two men come the next night to her party, at which she would enunciate what was on her mind. Is it any wonder that on that night the "sleep of the King was disturbed"?

Esther's goal was to transform the King's attitude toward Haman. But she could only go so far. She needed the assistance of the "One Who Spoke and the world came into being". On that night, Someone took over and orchestrated events in such a way that Haman's standing disintegrated.

Unable to sleep, the King had the State chronicles read for him. He noticed that Mordechai, who had reported the assassination plot of Bigsan and Seresh, had not been rewarded for saving his life.

At that very moment Haman who on the night of his greatest triumph could no longer tolerate the insouciance of Mordechai acted on the advice of his closest confidants to solicit permission to hang Mordechai immediately. So Haman stood in the outer court of the King when suddenly he was summoned to proffer advice on how to properly reward Mordechai. Responding to the summons of the King, Haman blissfully walked into the trap, little suspecting what he was in for.

The King was now toying with Haman because he had been awakened to his actual selfish nature and his true intention to exploit the empire for his own selfish purposes. Thus, he asked him what should be done to the one whom the King wants to honor. But he purposely did not tell him who that might be or what he was being feted for. The King intended to reward Haman's archenemy, Mordechai, and, adding insult to injury, desired that Haman, personally, dispense all the honors.

Haman displayed no political caution and eagerly took the bait. He was convinced that he was the one whom Achashveirosh had in mind, so in answering the question revealed his deep-seated ambitions. The honoree should be attired in the King's wardrobe, be seated on the royal steed and led through the streets to the proclamation of "This is what is done to the one whom the King wants to honor. (Esther 6:9)" This was all that Achashverosh needed to hear (he found Haman's inclusion of the monarch's crown particularly galling) and he ordered Haman to do those exact things to Mordechai, the Jew, "who sits in the King's gate".

The humiliation and unmasking of Haman was now complete. The actual coup de grâce came that night at the second party, when Esther made the request that her life and that of her People be spared. The King responded, "Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?" Esther answered, "The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman". The fury of the King against Haman now reached its peak and, when informed of the tree that he had prepared for the demise of Mordechai, commanded, "Hang him on it. (Esther 7:9)"

The miracle of Purim consisted of the wondrous transformation whereby Haman's cruelty and disloyalty was exposed and the faithfulness of the Jews came to light. Mordechai was appointed to take the place of Haman, the Jews obtained a lofty status in the realm and their enemies were thoroughly routed.

What was unique about the miracle was that it entailed a cooperation between human initiative and Divine Providence. Esther implemented a bold and ingenious plan. In order to succeed, certain factors outside of her control had to line up in a certain way. Because of the national Teshuva (repentance) which was brought about by the three-day fast of Esther, the Jews became worthy of Hashem's protection.

May this story serve to inspire us to return to the ways of the Torah, to seek to act with wisdom and boldness in all our endeavors, and to become worthy of Hashem's eternal beneficence.

Shabbat Shalom V'Chag Purim Sameach.

Dear Friends,

My newest book, *Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra* was recently published, and is now available at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of VaYikra and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com.

Additionally, for those in *Eretz Yisrael*, my books are available at David Linden's bookstore located at Emek Refaim Street 21, Jerusalem and at Pomeranz Book store, Be'eri 5 Jerusalem. They are very nice stores to visit and browse.

—Rabbi Reuven Mann