

# MEGILLAS ESTHER

תשפ"ג

The background story of the megillah starts with who is Achashveirosh.

Achashveirosh was a stable boy for Belshazzar. His daughter happened to fall in love with him. Hashem works in mysterious ways.

Nevuchadnezzar was allowed to destroy the Beis Hamikdash only because Hashem decreed this as a punishment for Klal Yisroel's aveiros. He sent Klal Yisroel into golus. But Hashem told the novi that this golus will only last 70 years, and then the Jews will return to Eretz Yisroel. This prediction of the novi went against the ego of all the emperors who conquered their enemies and built their empires. They wanted to think it was all from their military strength and strategy which achieved victory over Hashem's people. Hashem is saying I sent Klal Yisroel into golus and I will dictate when Klal Yisroel will leave golus.

So each emperor calculated when the 70 years would be up and eagerly waited to see who is really in charge of Klal Yisroel. If the Jews didn't go back as predicted, it means they were victorious over Hashem. Belshazzar made his calculation of when the 70 years were up. When it occurred and the Jews had not left, he made a big feast to celebrate his victory. That very night, he was killed. This should have been a sign to everyone that Hashem is running the world. But people don't learn the lesson. If a person is so invested in what he wants, his ambitions will twist his mind into pretzels to avoid confronting the uncomfortable reality.

Belshazzar's son-in-law Achashveirosh became the emperor. It wasn't easy for Achashveirosh to just take over a large empire overnight. He had a lot of problems in managing 128 provinces. How does he assert control? On the third year of his reign, he succeeded in solidifying his power and he celebrated. But he also celebrated because he also made his calculation of when the 70 years would arrive. Now since the Jews haven't left his empire, he thinks he has beaten Hashem and he runs the world.

Many people throughout history thought they control the world. Pharaoh thought he was a god and created the Nile. He actually convinced himself of this fantasy. But he still had bodily functions that he had to take care of. So for 15 minutes out of every day, he was forced to accept that he is a normal human being. For the rest of the 23 hours and 45 minutes of the day, he went right back to being an immortal god. Moshe already performed 9 makkos which brought absolute chaos and destruction to Egypt. But the night of makkas bechoros, Pharaoh was still able to go to sleep in his bed – like any ordinary night. In his mind, there was nothing to worry about because he is a god and he is in charge. Such is the power of self-delusion.

Achashveirosh wanted to show off his enormous wealth and impress everyone. So he threw a drunken feast which lasted 180 days – to give enough time for everyone to appreciate how fabulously wealthy he was. But Achashveirosh has another problem. He needed to make sure the people in his capitol city were going to be totally loyal to him in case there would be a revolt. So he threw a special seven day feast, and he served the wine in the keilim of the Beis Hamikdash. He is declaring he has beaten Hashem.

Vashti the queen also threw her own party for the women. Why? She is celebrating the victory over the Jews as well. She is acting as if she is in charge of the empire since she put Achashveirosh into power. So although Achashveirosh is actually running everything, she felt that she is his superior. There is a power struggle between them. Achashveirosh wanted to assert his control over her, so he orders Vashti to appear

before the men in a humiliating fashion. Naturally, Vashti refused. But to get rid of Vashti isn't so easy because she is his claim to the throne. What will the inner political circle say? Does Achashveirosh really care about his queen who brought him into power? Is he concerned about what is good for her? No. She is simply a tool to be used and then discarded when no longer useful. Many people look at other people as nothing more than a means to satisfy their ambitions in life.

Take this war in Ukraine. Putin is sending thousands of Russian soldiers to die every single day. Wave after wave of people dying. The waste of human life is incredible. Does Putin care about them? Not at all. The soldiers are simply tools for his ego and his grandiose plans of being Peter the Great and taking over large amounts of Europe again. That is a product of a society of taivoh.

The dor hamabbul had a simple philosophy – taivoh. First the permitted taivos, then the forbidden taivos, then the unnatural taivos. In the end, there is gezel. There is nothing more valuable than fulfilling my desires. There is no human being with any inherent value. All the people around me are only means to satisfy my ego and my desires. No tzelem Elokim. So I do what I want with them as it suits my needs.

Achashveirosh had a dilemma. He wanted to kill Vashti but it had to be justified and be made acceptable to the political class. In comes Homon. He gets up and tells Achashveirosh it is absolutely vital to kill Vashti to send a message to all the women that they cannot defy their husbands. Of course, Homon is only saying this because he has his own agenda. He is having sholom bayis problems with Zeresh and he sees an opportunity to assert his power over his household by having Achashveirosh kill Vashti. Homon doesn't have Achashveirosh's needs in mind. He only has his own selfish needs in mind and he is using this incident to his personal advantage. There is no human being there to have a genuine relationship with. Every human being is only a means to an end – no tzelem Elokim in anyone.

So they get rid of Vashti. But now Achashveirosh needs a replacement. He orders all the women in the empire to apply for the position. It will take him five to six years to go through them all. Each night, another woman – just to fulfill his taivos. They are merely objects for him to use for one night and throw away when he is done with them.

Now we are introduced to a different kind of human being – Mordechai. He is a member of the Sanhedrin – a very special individual. He went into golus along with the Sanhedrin before the churbon. He adopted Esther and eventually married her because she was an orphan with no other family – a totally selfless act of kindness. What is his relationship with Esther? It is genuine, honest. Not selfish and ego-centered.

When you mature and grow in life, you will find out that honest relationships are very valuable. People who feel they can manipulate other people and use them to get what they want, aren't going to have fulfilling lives. They won't have meaningful relationships with spouses, children, friends, business partners, etc. One of the serious problems people have today is developing honest, genuine relationships with people.

A Jew has an interesting obligation – to treat every other Jew as a neshomo – a tzelem Elokim – as a complete world unto himself. He is not an object to use and throw away. He is not a number. We don't count Jews. Only Hashem is capable of counting Jews because He will not reduce them to numbers. He can preserve the infinite value of each individual despite counting them.

My rebbe told me a story about Reb Chaim after the First World War. He was in Minsk and kept hearing report after report of all the Jewish communities that were destroyed. It was devastating to Reb Chaim. Someone tried to console him and asked, wouldn't it be worth it if all this destruction would eventually bring Moshiach faster? Reb Chaim got upset. He told him you don't appreciate the infinite value of each individual Jew. We have an obligation to be mechalel Shabbos to save any Jewish life – no matter how wicked he may be. If the life of an individual Jew is more valuable than Shabbos, it is also more valuable than the coming of Moshiach.

The idea of socialism and communism is to devalue the individual for the benefit of society. The person is only valuable in as much as he contributes to the group. This idea is anti-Jewish and anti-Torah.

In Torah – the group is valuable because it is made up of individuals with value. Each person values himself and values others because we all have a neshomo. You are not just an object I can use for my own needs.

Homon rose to power and was very wealthy. He is manipulating Achashveirosh for his own needs. Now Esther is the queen and she doesn't need Mordechai to take care of her anymore. But Esther still keeps her relationship with Mordechai. Mordechai instructed her to keep her identity secret and she obeys him.

Mordechai heard about the plot of Bigsan and Seresh to kill Achashveirosh. He could rationalize to himself that it is better for him not to interfere with their plans, because this might put Esther in charge and he may be elevated through her. But Mordechai doesn't make any selfish calculations. He told Esther to warn Achashveirosh about the plot and he saved his life.

Homon ordered everyone to bow down to him and Mordechai was the only one who refuses. Homon couldn't tolerate anything less than 100% compliance. Once you are drunk on your own ego, there is nothing that stops your ambition and it destroys you. Napoleon, Hitler, they conquered Europe! But their egos weren't satisfied. It drove them to invade Russia as well and it was their undoing.

There is one Jew who defies him, and Homon has to get rid of all the Jews as revenge. How is he going to get control of all the Jews in the empire? He offers money to Achashveirosh and in return, he gets the ring – the symbol of power. But all he has isn't worth anything when there is one Jew who isn't bowing down to him.

Mordechai tells Esther she has to be moser nefesh for Klal Yisroel. She can't hide in the palace and feel she will be safe there as the queen. Hashem put you in the palace and you are only there to do what Hashem wants. Don't think it is because of your talents.

Homon is consoling himself by all his possessions and his wife and children. They all serve to bolster his ego – there is no genuine human relationship with his family. They are simply means to his ends.

Achashveirosh gets paranoid that Homon is secretly trying to betray him, and he gets rid of Homon.

How do the Jews react to their sudden victory over their enemies? At the beginning of the megilloh, we have a drunken feast with no boundaries and no ruchniyus – just like the drinking of most bochurim on Purim. At the end of the megilloh, we have a different form of

mishteh and simcha. It is together with mishloach monos and matonos le'evyonim. When Achashveirosh makes a simcha, all he cares about is how it is going to impress the important people in his empire who he needs on his side. He cares that the wine is good and that there is plenty of zkus to make everyone his ally in case of revolt. It's all about using the feast to manipulate people and consolidate his power and his control. It's only about him.

When a Jew has a seudas Purim, he wants to share his simcha with other people. He is part of Klal Yisroel. If people are less fortunate than he is, he can't be happy if they aren't happy. He wants to raise their spirits and make sure they feel good too. It is not about him. It is the opposite of Achashveirosh and Homon.

The Rambam says you have to spend more money on matonos le'evyonim than you spend on the seudah and the mishloach monos. The message is that this is the biggest part of the simcha on Purim. Making other people happy. Not getting drunk and making sure you have a good time and ignoring everyone else.

When I was young, I wondered why we sing the part about the keilim in the Beis Hamikdash being used at the feast to the tune of Eichah – right in the middle of Megillas Esther! But then I realized that we aren't mourning about the mere use of the keilim. We are mourning the fact that there were Jews at this party who were participating while the non-Jews are drinking and getting drunk from the keilim of the Beis Hamikdash. That is the saddest thing of all – to read that the Jews of Shushan lost all sensitivity to the chillul kedushah that was happening at this feast. How could they be there? They are not living a life of what it means to be a Jew.

The megilloh teaches us the Jewish value of sharing your simcha with someone else – having an honest, genuine human relationship instead of these fake, manipulative relationships. The main message of the megilloh is understanding the different types of relationships we can have.

We live in a crazy world where people don't have honest relationships and they don't value them. Who suffers from this? The person himself. If you don't have an honest relationship before you get married, you won't have an honest relationship after you are married.

The shidduch crisis is really a human crisis. People put on their resume some ridiculous fantasy about who they pretend to be, and try to match up with someone else's ridiculous fantasy of who they pretend to be. No-one knows who they are really seeing when they meet another person. Then they get married and discover that there is actually a human being who they never really confronted beforehand. And they have no clue of how to develop an honest relationship with that person.

We live in a society where every frum neighborhood has dozens of marriage therapists trying to piece together relationships that were built on total sheker with no mutual trust. It is a six-month wait to get to see any of them.

There are different ways of dealing with people – peers, rebbeim, other human beings.

There is Achashveirosh's way of manipulation and there is Mordechai's way of honesty and real care and concern for the other person's happiness. That creates genuine simcha.