

PURIM

תשפ"ו

The simcha of Purim is a fundamental simcha in Klal Yisroel. What is it all about?

It is the story that goes through all Jewish history – from the time of Mordechai and Esther till today.

Klal Yisroel were sent to golus after the churbon because of the three severe aveiros plus the fact that they didn't have sufficient zechuyos from limud Torah to protect them. We have discussed this many times.

The novi predicted that golus Bavel would last seventy years and then they would return. But it wasn't at all clear when these seventy years would be up, because the process of golus Bavel had many stages to it. The novi didn't say at which stage did the seventy-year countdown begin.

There is a simple question that confuses people at all times. Who runs the world? Was the overwhelming might of the Babylonian army responsible for the churbon? Or was Nevuchadnezer just a pawn in Hashem's hands to carry out the gezeirah that was going to be fulfilled regardless?

The Babylonian Empire became the massive Persian Empire because of a critical event. Belshatzar made his calculation about when he thought the seventy years were over. When that time came and he saw Klal Yisroel were not redeemed from his control, he celebrated his victory over Hashem. The nevu'oh wasn't fulfilled and he made a feast. He was struck dead on the spot. Hashem was sending a message that He runs the world, but people don't get the message.

A little while before that, Belshatzar had a daughter Vashti who fell in love with a stable-boy named Achashveirosh. After her father was killed, she inherited the throne and her husband Achashveirosh became the emperor. It took a few years for Achashveirosh to solidify his empire and then he makes a cheshbon – the seventy years are now surely up! Klal Yisroel are still under my control! I have defeated Hashem. So he too made a wild, drunken feast in celebration of his victory over Hashem. He made a rule – every person drinks whatever he wants.

Mordechai told the Jews not to go. It fundamentally goes against our lifestyle as Jews. It isn't just piety and mussar. It is basic halocho not to pursue pleasure just for the sake of pleasure and not to adopt the immoral lifestyle of non-Jews. Imagine 180 days of non-stop eating, drinking, znus – complete indulgence of the guf while throwing down a challenge that Hashem is not in charge of the world. And the Jews want to join this seudoh?

The problem we have had throughout our history is maintaining our unique identity as a Jewish nation. We look around and see other cultures and lifestyles and we are eager to imitate them. We forget the brocho we make every morning of "shelo asani goy". It's not just the extra mitzvos – it's the entirely different approach to life and what we are living for. But the Jews of Shushan saw this incredible feast and didn't want to stand out. They naturally wanted to be normal and adopt the lifestyle of the people around them.

Mordechai pleaded with them not to go – it isn't what you're about. But they went anyway.

Achashveirosh is a very proud man and doesn't want the feeling that his status comes from his Babylonian wife. He needs to show he is in total control so he demands Vashti to come to the public in a

disgraceful, humiliating way to prove a point. Vashti refuses to come and Achashverosh is in a bind what to do.

Now Hashem starts pulling the strings.

There is this adviser Memuchan – who is Homon – that has his own issues of sholom bayis with his wife. He sees an opportunity to take control of his household by advising Achashveirosh to kill Vashti. That will put his wife in line. So Homon tells Achashveirosh that he doesn't need royal blood from the Babylonians to claim his right to the throne. He can forget about Vashti – she is only a liability to him.

Megillas Esther is a series of stark contrasts between different types of people. Some people see others simply as tools to use to maximize their ego and their physical needs. They don't look at other people as human beings with a tzelem Elokim. They are just objects to be manipulated and then discarded when their usefulness ends. It is a lifestyle that has no connection to the Torah.

It is amazing that when we read the megillah, we chant the words וְהִשְׁקוּת בְּכֵלֵי זָהָב וְכֵלִים מְקֻלָּיִם שׁוֹנִיִּם to the tune of Eichoh, to signify that Achashveirosh brought out the keilim of the Beis Hamikdash to be used by his guests to get drunk at this feast. And the Jews came to this feast! It is unimaginable, but the Jews are participating in their very own downfall. They lost their sense of kedushoh and got swept up in the degrading and immoral lifestyle that is celebrating their defeat.

But unfortunately, it wasn't only the Jews of Shushan. When we see Jews today getting drunk and acting like wild animals like the non-Jews in the street, we can understand how this process works.

All of the sudden, Hashem arranges for Esther to become the queen. How are we introduced to Esther? Through her uncle Mordechai. He adopted her and married her because she was orphaned from her mother and father at birth. He showed complete devotion to his niece – absolute chessed. And Esther respects Mordechai to the heavens. It is the total opposite of the personalities we have seen up till now in the Megillah. Esther becomes royalty, and Mordechai warns her that under no circumstances is she to reveal her Jewish identity. Why? The gemara explains that Mordechai didn't want Klal Yisroel to feel that they had an insider in the palace. After all they have a sister in the palace! What is there to be afraid of?

So Esther honors Mordechai's request and she maintains her secret.

There is another part of the story that is happening simultaneously – the plot of Bigson and Seresh. Hashem is planting seeds of salvation. It doesn't just happen in one loud bang. It develops slowly and gradually over time.

Mordechai overhears the plot to kill the emperor and he tells Esther to warn Achashveirosh about it. Esther is careful to convey the information in Mordechai's name. No-one is acting out of self-interest. Mordechai is genuinely trying to save the emperor. He doesn't ask for any reward. Esther doesn't take the credit for herself. She attributes her information to the true source – Mordechai. Another piece of the puzzle is put in place.

Then Homon comes on the scene. Achashveirosh is going broke from all the wars he is fighting. Homon is massively wealthy and offers Achashveirosh, who is desperate for money, to deliver the Jews to him for a hefty sum. The story unfolds.

Then one night, the sleep of the king is disturbed. The Baal Koreh sings

