



Lesson 5, Series 2

PURIM *THE Whole Megillah*

The Persian Empire ruled by King Achashverosh in the fourth century BCE, extended to 127 lands.

After executing his wife, Queen Vashti, the king combed the land for a new queen. Esther a pious Jewess found favor in the king's eyes and became queen. Meanwhile, Haman the wicked, was appointed prime minister and ordered all including Mordechai, to bow down to him. Haman the anti-semitic was infuriated by Mordechai's refusal which resulted in a decree by the king to exterminate the Jews on the 13th of Adar, as per a lottery.

Mordechai gathered all the Jews to fast and repent and to pray to Hashem. At a feast which Esther planned, she revealed her Jewish identity and asked the king to save herself and her people. As a result, Haman was hanged. Mordechai became Prime Minister.

A new decree was issued granting the Jews the right to defend themselves. On the 13th of Adar the Jews killed many of their enemies and they rested and celebrated on the 14th of Adar. As such, the 14th of Adar was established as our holiday of Purim for all times.

Mitzvot of Purim: Hear the reading of the Megillah 2x eve and day of Purim, a special mitzvah of charity to the poor, gift of food to friends, a festive meal that includes meat and wine. A beautiful Purim tradition is to dress in costume alluding to the fact that G-d's hand was disguised by natural events in the Purim story.

At a climactic moment in the Book of Esther, Mordechai sends a message to Queen Esther, to approach the king, reveal her identity and beg him to spare her people. Esther responds: "approaching the king without being summoned would be suicidal." In response Mordechai declares: "Don't imagine that you alone amongst all the Jews will be saved. If you remain quiet the Jewish people will find salvation through a different means *but perhaps your role as queen came precisely for this moment!*"

Does G-d need Esther to save the Jewish people or doesn't He? What Mordechai was impressing upon Esther was her personal destiny and purpose. He told her that as it relates to the Jewish people, they will be saved one way or another, but there is a greater personal concern and that is *your* destiny in life and the reason your soul descended upon earth- the salvation of the Jewish people should come in *your* merit.

The message to Esther is a message to each of us. We learn that Hashem has a plan. As such His plan is carried out, and the designated person He chooses acts as the agent to fulfill His plan. Yes, there is a master plan for all humans to transform the world, but where do I fit into this big picture? I have a unique role to play in this grand plan, and no one else can take my place. Our mission is not ultimately our own gratification, rather to others and above all to G-d. We are able to find and actualize our true potential only when we lose ourselves in a larger purpose and mission. Having been given a

designated lifespan to accomplish our mission, we must collect all our potential and ability and take advantage of every opportunity to fulfill our mission.

In the words of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993): Man is created as an agent with a mission. The essence of his/her creation-birth-necessarily contains within it the appointment of agency. The fact that someone lives in a certain time, in a particular era, and in a defined place, and is not born in a different era or under different circumstances, can be understood, only if we accept the concept of human purpose. The world's creator acts in accordance with the Torah law which states that one should not appoint someone for a role that is beyond that agent's abilities. It is therefore imperative to give him/her the power to affect it. It is for this reason that the individual is created in such a time and place in which he is able to effect his actions for the sake of the fulfillment of his/her mission.

The concept of personal mission is central to Jewish philosophy as Hillel states in Ethics of our Fathers 1:14, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

Here is the million dollar question: How is one supposed to know what their mission is on this earth?

Although only G-d knows the answer, we cannot live life aimlessly. Rather we need a compass and a mission statement. Thus life must be slated on discovering our mission. Bringing together Torah as a guide and all the tools we are personally equipped with; our personality, convictions, interests and so much more, we must become proactive to follow the path that is best prescribed, as we understand and as we feel. Chiya, nephew of Rabbi Elazar Hakapor, had a beautiful voice. Rabbi Elazar used to tell him, "Chiya, my son, rise and honor the Lord with what he has graced you."

No opportunity that comes your way is random, and nothing happens by chance. **The Ba'al Shem Tov**, founder of Chassidism, taught that everything that happens to us is by divine providence, Hashgacha Protis, G-d's intention being that the person should engage in a particular divine service, thereby rectifying what he/she must rectify. As in the Purim story, Queen Esther's miraculous ascension to the monarchy put her in a unique position to be verily close up to King Achashverosh and thereby ensure her miraculous defense of the Jewish people at that time.

When **Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, The Alte Rebbe**, was imprisoned in Petersburg for his unwavering self-sacrifice for the Jewish people, one of the ministers asked him: How is it, that the G-d in your Torah asked Adam, the first man, "Ayeka-where are you?" Surely G-d knew. The Alte Rebbe responded by quoting Rashi's explanation. But the investigator who already knew that, wanted to hear The Rebbe's understanding of the verse. **Rabbi Shneur Zalman responded: Ayeka-where are you is G-d's call to every person asking, "Where do you stand? You were given so many days and so many years on earth, and you must constantly ask yourself: What have I accomplished in those years, and how much good have I contributed to the world?"** Today, take on your mission, your unique mission, to accomplish what only you can and no one else can do!

Dear Friend:

This Lesson in a Box is a gift from Aleph Learning Institute of Baltimore gleaned from our Rosh Chodesh Society classes. It is our intent to impart the knowledge of Torah to you. We hope this venue at your doorstep, accommodates your busy schedule. We have enclosed 2 boxes especially for Purim. Please give one to a friend, neighbor or family member, as your fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Shalach Manot!

In the event you would like to share in our work for the enhancement of Jewish education, please visit us at www.alephlearninginstitute.org and make a donation.

With warmest wishes for a Happy Purim!

Sincerely,


Rochelle Kaplan, Founder & Director, Aleph Learning Institute

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