

BS"D Parashat Tzav 5782

IMPORTANT: We have just been informed that due to the sudden hike in gas prices in the US, and after a frantic emergency telephone conference of the Reform Movement's halachic committee, they have announced a temporary heter that one may go to temple on Saturday even by foot.

Purim Samay'ach

Megillat Esther

When assessing the conduct of King Achashverosh, it is apparent that he was apprehensive about his monarchical status. He was not born to royalty but was a stable hand of Nevuchadnetzer, father of his present Queen Vashti. The fact that the Queen was born to royalty while he was a commoner instilled in him strong feelings of insecurity.

How do we know this?

The Megillah begins with the lavishly degenerate parties hosted by Achashverosh in order to find favor with his inner circle and with the public at large. The King's policy of populism was the reason that he agreed to Haman's suggestion to murder all the Jews in one single 24-hour day, to the delight of the Persian citizens.

However, this was a feat that even the arch-murderer Hitler could not achieve. The question is how could the Persian army complete this grandiose order, involving millions of Jews in the 127 provinces under Persian control?

The answer lies in the fact that the "aktion" was not

relegated to the army, who could not know where every Jew lived or was hiding but was entrusted to the 'friendly' Persian neighbors who knew where their Jewish neighbors lived and where they were hiding. As in the 1929 Hevron massacre and the annual pogroms in Ukraine and throughout Europe, they were perpetrated by the plain "folk". But why should these nice people murder their Jewish neighbors – the Goldbergs and Sacks, the Schwartzes and Kleins? It was King Achashverosh's need to be loved and revered that led him to bestow generous gifts to his non-Jewish subjects. In this case, when they would murder their Jewish neighbors, they would be allowed to take their victims' property and possessions.

Populism at its best and its worst, but it works!

Question: Why was it necessary for Mordechai and Esther to include the incidence of Vashti's death in the Megillah's text, when the main narrative of the story is the King's need to find a wife? Wouldn't it have been sufficient to begin the Megillah with the search for a queen without the morbid details of Vashti?

I will return to this be"n.

The Invisible Factor

Following is a fundamental principle when composing a literary or theatrical drama:

There are five elements in most dramatic events in stories and plays created by authors and playwrights – Exposition (background), Ascending Action, Conflict (between opposing forces, ideas or interests), Climax and Surprise Resolution.

In fact, HaShem as the ultimate Playwright incorporates them

in the major episodes of TaNaCh and history. However, in contrast to our literary giants, HaShem often incorporates a sixth element – an embedded invisible factor. It can be an individual or a nation who apparently has little or no input on the visible narrative, but later proves to be the major factor in the unfolding events.

The five elements in the Megillah saga are:

EXPOSITION: The King's inappropriate behavior at the party resulting in his imposing the death sentence upon Queen Vashti. When the King sobers up, he orders a nationwide beauty contest to choose a new queen. The winner (or loser) turned out to be the Jewish Esther.

ASCENDING ACTION: Haman's favored status and his convincing Achashverosh to have all the Jews murdered on a single day – the following 13th of Adar.

CONFLICT: Haman's obsession to kill Mordechai and all the Jews.

CLIMAX: Esther's second party and her dramatic accusation against Haman who was subsequently hanged.

SURPRISE RESOLUTION: According to Persian law, a King's edict could not be rescinded. When the King discovers that Esther is a Jewess and subject to the fate of all the other Jews in his 127 provinces, he suddenly realizes that he must save her life by bypassing his own edict and permitting the Jews to bear arms. It is not out of love for his Queen that he has to protect her and all the Jews, because he has many other women who can take her place. Why did Achashverosh suddenly act to save the Jews by permitting them to bear arms and even to kill Achashverosh's own Persian citizens?

It is here that HaShem, the ultimate Master of suspense, goes one step beyond the tale of Purim with an embedded factor that compelled the King to agree to all of Esther's demands.

Here is the cutting edge of the entire Megillah. Achashverosh is sitting on a wobbly throne. If he allows Queen Esther to be killed after ordering the death of his first Queen Vashti, his reputation as a rational and deserving leader will be tarnished to the point of rebellion and his own death (which nearly occurred at the hands of Bigtan and Teresh). So, the murder of two queens was not an option for the King. Esther, and consequently all her nation of Jews, must be saved.

Vashti is the invisible embedded personality that brings about the miracle of Purim.

One more example of a major saga which came about because of an embedded personality:

The apparent lesson from the Akeida (binding) of Yitzchak is the total submission of Avraham and Yitzchak to the will of HaShem. However, that's not the real reason that HaShem initiated the Akeida test.

The Torah relates that after three days of travelling from Hevron, the entourage which includes Avraham's first son Yishmael and Avraham's slave Eliezer, stood overlooking the future Temple Mount. Avraham turns to Yishmael and Eliezer and instructs them to remain where they are together with the donkey.

Avraham and Yitzchak begin walking to Mount Moriah. This was the exact moment for which HaShem brought about the Akeida episode. The embedded personality was Yishmael who was being put to the test to decide his fate and that of his descendants for all time.

When Avraham began walking towards Mount Moriah, Yishmael knew that the mission was for his father to sacrifice his son in the service of HaShem. It was then that Yishmael stood at a crossroads in his life, one that would define his spiritual connection to Avraham and to Avraham's God. It was then that Yishmael thought to say to Avraham, "Abba. Take me. I am

the favored of HaShem and not Yitzchak. I want to serve HaShem with all my heart, soul and body even unto death". Instead, Yishmael could not bring himself to do so and stood paralyzed, thereby severing his spiritual connection with Avraham and with HaShem for all time. Yishmael stands by the wayside together with the donkey, because that is his spiritual level.

This is the real story about why HaShem commanded Avraham to offer up Yitzchak as a sacrifice. It was in order to cut Yishmael off from all kedusha (holiness), as we see today in the people who abide by Islam.

Another example:

Russia has declared war on Ukraine. Thousands of soldiers and civilians on both sides have lost their lives or been wounded and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have been left homeless. The apparent reason is Russia's ambition to restore control over all the nations which comprised the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The drama gripping the world today is whether Putin will use chemical or even nuclear weapons and expand his war to include NATO countries.

Is this the reality or is there an embedded factor which is responsible for HaShem bringing about these events? Since the drama is still being played out, no one can know for sure. However, the invisible embedded factor that is generating these events could be the agreement being discussed in Vienna between European countries with the US on one side, and Iran on the other. Perhaps the war in Eastern Europe will prevent the agreement from being signed? Time will tell.

I offer one more embedded personality who was the cause of the drama in his time.

Ya'akov's sons go down to Egypt in order to purchase food

during the devastating seven-year famine. They suddenly find themselves entangled in an ominous and complex relationship with the Vizier of Egypt, one step away from life imprisonment in an Egyptian penitentiary.

At the crucial moment, when all hope is gone and the brothers do not understand how this is happening to them, two words are said by the Vizier and everything becomes crystal clear:

אני יוסף

I am Yosef

Yosef is the embedded factor that HaShem has placed in order to cause the Jewish people to descend to Egypt for the following 410 years.

The day will come soon, when HaShem will call out from Yerushalayim and rock the foundations of humanity

אני ה'

I am the Lord

The world will realize then that the Jewish nation, HaShem's chosen people, are the embedded factor causing all the world's events from Avraham until Medinat Yisrael.

Purim Samay'ach & Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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