



Purim's Prayer

The themes and lessons that are woven throughout the Purim story, celebration and mitzvot are numerous. The Talmud (*Megillah 11a*) records how several different *Amoraim* would introduce a discourse on the Megillah by relating a particular verse that he felt encapsulated the Purim story. Rav Massna maintained that the following verse epitomizes the overall Purim motif. “*Ki mi goy gadol asher lo Elokim kerovim eilav ke’Hashem Elokeinu bechol koreinu eilav* - For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as Hashem our God is at all times that we call upon Him?” (*Devarim 4:7*) Rambam echoes this idea as one of the main purposes of reading the Megillah. Let us explore where we find this theme manifested in the Megillah and in our *avodah* of the day.

Keri’at Megillah, reading the Megillah, is the only mitzvah of Purim that is performed both on Purim night and during the day as well. The source for this is King David’s cry, “*Elokai ekra yomam ve’lo ta’aneh ve’layla ve’lo dumiya li* – Oh my G-d! I call out by day and You do not answer; and by night, but there is no respite for me.” (*Tehillim 22:3*) The reading at night has the quality of *tefillah*, while the day reading expresses praise to Hashem, *hallel*, for our salvation. We are reminded

of our people’s prayers, both during the night and the day as well, at the time of the Purim miracle. Indeed, Purim usually follows *Ta’anit Esther*, a day that is characterized by *tefillah* and *teshuvah*. The fast day recalls how the Jews fasted, prayed, and did *teshuvah* as a means to prepare themselves for battle on the 13th of Adar. It is an auspicious time for us to daven as well, evoking the merit of Mordechai and Esther, to recite chapter 22 of *Tehillim* and then ask Hashem for our personal requests. *Ta’anit Esther* prepares us for the megillah reading at night, as our mindset becomes one of “fasting and crying out.”

Mordechai of the Purim story is an individual who personifies *tefillah*. The Gemara (*Megillah 12b*) teaches that his ancestors’ names all express the theme of his *tefillah*. His father is called Yair to express how Mordechai “enlightened the Jews’ eyes with his *tefillah*.” His grandfather is Shim’i as a description of “one whom Hashem heard his prayer;” his great-grandfather Kish is named thus as he “banged on the doors of heaven and they opened.” Mordechai’s own name is related to “*mor dror*,” the incense spice, which is associated with the service of Hashem. We see that Mordechai’s immediate reaction to Achashveirosh’s decree was to rip his clothes and cry out in *tefillah*. Even after he is driven through the streets wearing the king’s royal garments, he returns to his sackcloth and prayer. The Chatam Sofer learns from his actions - even when the ‘tides turn’ and things look like they are changing for the

good, one should never stop davening until the full salvation has been achieved.


Most fascinating is that the middle verse of the Megillah signifies supplication and plea, “*Vata’an Esther vatomar, she’eilati u’vakashati*” (*Esther 5:7*); Esther states that she has a request and appeal. This clearly points to the core of the megillah - asking, requesting, calling out to Hashem. Further, the middle word of the entire Megillah is “*she’eilati*,” my request! Our focus is what we request from Hashem - indeed, *she’eilah* has the same numerical value as Purim!


Rav Pinucs zt”l notes that after the Megillah reading is one of the most powerful moments for *tefillah*, the gates of heaven are open and we can daven fervently. This is an *et ratzon*, a propitious time, higher than *Ne’ilah* on Yom Kippur. Moreover, as Achaveirosh asked Esther at their feast what she requests, at our Purim feast, the King Himself asks ‘the Esther’ - the soul inside of each of us, what we most want. It is an auspicious time to daven for our deepest longings and desires. Rav Biderman tells us that each moment on Purim has a similar power and energy to that of *Kedushah* during *Ne’ilah* on Yom Kippur.

Especially this year, as *Am Yisrael* has been challenged in ways beyond our comprehension, we must harness this energy and daven earnestly not only for our personal entreaties, but also for the return of our hostages, the safety of our soldiers, and the protection of the entire Jewish people. ■




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