

PERSPECTIVES ON TROUBLE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In addition to the four Mitzvos (commandments) which we practice on Purim *(see below), there is one other idea which was written in the Book of Esther to be followed for generations. That is the "words of the fasts and their outcries (Esther 9:31)." This refers to the three days of fasting and prayer which the Jews did before Esther entered the king's inner chambers without permission. Why is this something so important for all generations? It is meant to teach us the perspective we should have about troubles, and praying for relief from them.

When Haman decreed that all Jews in the kingdom should be killed, and the written decree went out, it states in the Book of Esther "and Mordechai knew all that had occurred (Esther 4:1)." This means he understood for what purpose the decree had occurred. In Tractate Megillah one of the reasons given for the decree that the Jews should be killed is that they took part in the feast which King Achashverosh made. This great feast celebrated the passing of the seventy years prophesied that would end the exile and mark the rebuilding of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Many Jews had a desire to assimilate, and hence distance themselves from G-d. As a reaction to this G-d brought them a trouble meant to bring them closer. Mordechai understood this and acted accordingly.

"And he (Mordechai) donned sackcloth and ashes and he went out into the middle of the city and cried a great and bitter outcry (Esther:4:1)." This was Mordechai's initial reaction to the decree. Prayer. He understood that the decree was in order to bring the Jews closer, and so prayer was the first step in achieving that goal. Normally, the first step would be to work on the political level, and then to pray that their efforts would succeed. Here Mordechai knew that prayer was the first reaction since the whole trouble was to bring the Jews back to their closeness to G-d.

It's interesting to note that all of Mordechai's communications with Esther were through a messenger who went between them (Esther 4:4-16). One would think that at such a crucial time when the lives of so many people were threatened, that Mordechai would want to speak face to face with Esther. She even sent him clothing to replace his sackcloth so he would come and speak to her in person, but he refused. Why? Again, because being that the trouble was sent as a vehicle to bring the Jews closer to G-d through prayer, even one minute of prayer was not worth wasting, even to go speak to the wife of the King.

Even at the very end when it was obvious that Haman, the instigator of the evil decree, was on his way down, and that the decree would be averted, Mordechai did not behave any differently. Haman

is ordered to lead a royal horse with Mordechai on it dressed in royal robes and a royal crown (Esther 6:10). Even Zeresh, Haman's wife, and his close friends subsequently see in this event that it marks his imminent downfall (Esther 6:13). Still, Mordechai doesn't stop for one minute. "He got off the horse, and immediately put on his sackcloth and returned to his place to pray."

Our lesson from this is that troubles are not just a good reason to pray, and prayer is not just a vehicle to bring about relief from troubles. Rather, prayer is a reason why G-d brings about the troubles which stir a person to come closer to Him. That is why Mordechai continued to pray after he saw Haman's downfall as imminent.

May we all be blessed with a truly happy Purim, and through the lessons of the Purim Story may we all experience what is stated in the passage in the Book of Esther, "And the the Jews had light and happiness, joy and honor (Esther 8:16)."

*The four Mitzvos (commandments) of Purim

1. Hearing the reading of the Book of Esther.
2. Giving monetary gifts to the poor.
3. Giving two prepared food gifts to at least one other person.
4. Eating a festive Purim meal.

Good Shabbos.

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