

PARSHAS PURIM

by Gedalia Litke

Esther's forebears, Shaul and Rochel, committed noteworthy acts of tzniyus (modesty). Rochel covered her sister's potential embarrassment by conveying to her the special 'signs' Yaakov had pre-arranged, and Shaul, as instructed, kept secret his imminent appointment as king. As a result they merited Esther as a descendant. Esther herself is modest; she is called Esther (hidden) because, as instructed, she hid her nationality from Achashverosh. (Megillah 13a-b)

In this sense, Purim is a celebration of tzniyus. (Probably a better translation than modesty is privacy. A tzanuah is one who keeps private that which should be kept private. This of course transcends merely how we dress. It is interesting that all three examples of tzniyus in this Gemoro relate to speaking or feelings, not mode of dress.)

The events of Purim occurred during a time when there was no Bais HaMikdash - when HKB'H is hidden from view, so to speak; today we still live in a world of hester panim. Hester panim is the ultimate form of tzniyus, as HKB'H keeps Himself somewhat hidden from our view. The test of the Jewish people at that time was to understand that, notwithstanding the lack of direct connection through the Bais HaMikdash, HKB'H continues to run the world, unabated, albeit through hester panim.

For this reason Megilas Esther does not mention HaShem's name explicitly; He is somewhat hidden from view. On Purim we wear masks and costumes, again affirming our understanding that HKB'H runs our world, though from behind a mask. We even drink wine to bring out hidden aspects of our personality, or, as the Rambam says, to induce sleep, perhaps meaning we thereby achieve an altered consciousness in which we can imagine direct connection to HKB'H through a Bais Hamikdash.

In the times of the Bais HaMikdash it was there that one could derive the most direct connection to HKB'H. Today we rely upon the Jewish Home, a mikdash me'at, to serve this function. (An aside: it is certainly not a coincidence that the aggadita of Kamtza/Bar Kamtza, describing the destruction of the Bais HaMikdash, is found in Maseches Gittin, describing the destruction of a Jewish home.)

On Purim we acknowledge our existence under hester panim, and we seek to promote tzniyus, the preferred mode of behavior in reaction to hester panim. A Jewish home that promotes and teaches tzniyus, in every sense of the word, provides connectedness to HKB'H in these times of hester panim. This is because those who understand tzniyus by definition also understand hester panim:

that which is most essential and precious is hidden from view.

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