

WHAT'S BAD IS GOOD

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read parshas Ki Tisa. The central happening of this parsha is the chait ha'egel [the sin of the golden calf] and the ensuing discussion between Hashem and Moshe about how that event would affect the way Hashem would deal with Klal Yisroel [the Nation of Israel]. This is very applicable to the Purim holiday that we celebrate this week as Purim both ushered in and revealed to us the essence of a new stage.

Hashem instructed Moshe, together with Bnei Yisroel [the children of Israel], to ascend to Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel]. "V'shalachti l'fanecha mal'ach [And I will send before you an angel][33:2]." This angel will clear the way for you as you ascend "to the land flowing with milk and honey [33:3]."

The S'forno explains that Moshe was being told to take Bnei Yisroel out of the wilderness wherein they needed to be sustained miraculously. This was a level that they were no longer worthy of after the chait ha'egel. Instead, they were instructed to go to the land flowing with milk and honey. There they could be sustained in a non-miraculous manner.

"And the nation heard this bad news (that Hashem would not be resting amongst them to the degree that He had been) and they mourned [33:4]." The Bnei Yisroel mourned this loss of closeness between them and Hashem.

Hashem responds that "in one moment, while I'm going up with you (if you'll rebel against me) I'll destroy you [33:5]." The S'forno explains that Hashem was explaining to them that they were mourning and upset over something that was in their best interests. The degree to which Hashem's presence is revealed determines the severity of the affront when we rebel against Him. Being an "am k'shay oref [a 'stiff-necked people]" we were better off having a mal'ach [angel] travel with us in the place of Hashem Himself.

Moshe continue to plead on behalf of Bnei Yisroel until Hashem acquiesced -- He would accompany them. The mal'ach was put on hold until he appeared to Yehoshua when Yehoshua was about to begin his conquest of Eretz Yisroel.

Bnei Yisroel having elevated themselves through their t'shuvah [repentance] represented by their mourning, coupled with the prayers of Moshe, brought about the situation where it would no longer be better to have a mal'ach accompany them. Until that point, however, what we perceived as a cause for mourning was actually the best possible thing for us.

This is one of the basic teachings of Purim, contained in a seemingly very strange commandment. We know that the job of a Jew is to always retain focus of who he is and why he was sent down to this world. The more trying and difficult the situation through which one can maintain that focus -- the greater the individual. Yet, on Purim, we seem to be commanded to lose focus! "Ad d'lo yadah bain arur Haman l'baruch Mordechai" -- we are commanded to reach a state where we can't differentiate between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai". How can this commandment be understood?

The miracle of Purim took place during a very confusing period of our history. The first Temple had been destroyed and we were in the midst of the Babylonian exile. The era of prophecy had drawn to a close. Yirmiyahu's prophecy of our being redeemed after seventy years was quite ambiguous in terms of from when those seventy years should be counted. Acheshverosh's party was made to celebrate the expiration of those seventy years (according to his miscalculation) and the subsequent end of the nation of Israel. In his eyes, seventy years passing without the Jews being redeemed meant that Hashem had rejected them as a people and as a nation. (With this in mind, we can better understand the enormity of the sin of the Jews attending and participating in such a celebration.)

It is stated in our prayers that ultimately, "Hashem will be (recognized as) King over the entire land, on that day Hashem and His name will be One." In this world we have different names for Hashem which represent the different ways that we perceive Hashem's dealings with us. We have names for Hashem which refer to His attribute of mercy and other names which refer to His attribute of Justice. In the confusion of this world we see certain things as being 'tov' [good] and other's as 'ra' [evil]. Hashem's name is not One. However, ultimately, we will have the clarity of vision to see how it was all one attribute -- different ways of bringing about that very same result. At that time His name will be One.

At this confusing time in our history, Hashem needed to clearly show us that we had not been dismissed from our national mission nor had we been set adrift. Although there no longer were open revelations of Hashem to man, He was still intimately involved in shaping and guiding the happenings of the world. There would be a lot of apparent 'ra' going on, but that too would be harnessed by Hashem's guiding hand to shepherd this world toward its destiny.

At the time of Purim, Haman, the scion of Amalek, had brought the nation of Israel to the verge of annihilation. He had successfully removed Queen Vashti, allowing for his own personal power to grow. He had built gallows upon which he planned to publicly hang Mordechai, the leader of the Jews. He had set a date for the total destruction of the Jews and he had the whole kingdom as eager and ready accomplices. It was a time of overpowering 'ra'.

It was then that Hashem, who's name is not mentioned even once throughout Megilas Esther, showed that Haman was actually unwittingly preparing the Jewish nation's redemption with every step of his scheme of destruction. His removal of Queen Vashti opened the way for Queen Esther.

The gallows he prepared for Mordechai raised the ire of Achashverosh, prompting him to proclaim that Haman and his sons should be hung on those very gallows. The day set aside for our destruction turned into a day for us to avenge our enemies.

Each episode of the Megilah, if viewed as an isolated incident, could have been considered a simple coincidence. The entire Megilah, however, with its delicately woven series of events all combining into an exquisite tapestry, is clearly nothing else but the loving hand of Hashem. Concealed, yet coordinating the events, leading to the redemption of Bnei Yisroel and a subsequent rededication to Him and His Torah.

The miracle of Purim affords a view from the future, from the end of time, from the time of absolute clarity. From the "day that Hashem and His name will be One." A glimpse of that unity. An understanding that everything -- all that we perceive as 'tov' and all that we perceive as 'ra' -- is used by Hashem to bring about the ultimate destiny of Klal Yisroel. There is no difference between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai". All are tools in the hands of Hashem Echod (One).

Wishing you a joyous Purim and a good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

Copyright © 1998 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).
