

A GOD'S-EYE-VIEW OF HISTORY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

He called to Moshe, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying . . . (Vayikra 1:1)

Purim may now be behind us, but it still has something important to be said to us especially on our way to Pesach.

One of the things that makes Megillas Esther so enjoyable to read each year is that it is somewhat comical. Achashveros seems like a bumbling fool who, while in a drunken stupor, mistakenly has his wife, the queen, executed, while Haman seems more dangerous to himself than anyone else. Besides, we know how the story ends, which affords us the luxury of not sweating the scary parts.

In fact, one might wonder what the big deal was in the first place. Knowing Achashveros and Haman as we do, why did Mordechai make such a big deal about his rise to power, and threat to the Jewish people? It was just a matter of time, wasn't it, before their world came tumbling down, right?

Right. However, that is not the way it would have appeared to us had we been in the middle of it all. In fact, had we lived through the drama of the Megillah, it would have looked far more serious than it does to us now, something like Hitler, y"s, rising to power and getting a green light from the rest of the world to carry out his Final Solution.

So, then, why is there such a discrepancy between what really happened and what we read? Why isn't the Megillah truer to history and read more like an adult book than a child's bedtime story? If Mordechai and Esther wanted to impress upon future generations how close the Jewish people came to extinction, shouldn't they have written a more suspenseful version of what happened?

Not this time. This time, it was not only about telling the story as it happened, but about telling the story as it happened according to God's point of view. If the storyline of the Megillah seems somewhat ludicrous—and it does—it was intentional. The Gedolim of the Purim miracle when recording the story of Haman's rise to and fall from power wanted to impress upon generations of Jews an alternative way to look at the events of history.

The Talmud, in Megillah of course, tells us that God does not inflict the Jewish people without first creating the solution to the problem (Megillah 13b). This is because all that God does to the Jewish people is for their own good, as hard as that is to believe after something like the Holocaust. Whether it is to an individual Jew, or to a part of the nation, or to the entire nation, all that God does is for the good (Brochos 60b), though that good may take a long time to surface, like during Yemos

HaMoshiach, Techiyas HaMeisim, or in the World-to-Come.

Regardless, the bottom line is that God wants every Jew to survive, ultimately. As the Leshem explains, even the worst of Jews eventually gets to the World-to-Come; it's just a question of how much time he has to spend in Gihennom before getting there.

The trouble with this world is that it seems so real. President Obama seems to have the power to dictate the terms of survival to the Israeli people, and seems headed for a second term, more than likely to the detriment of the Jewish people. Remember the last time the U.S. chose to take a pacifist approach to a world threat, and paid dearly for it after the fact? A democrat sat in office at the time, and may have ignored signs that might have mitigated the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the extent of WWII.

And, on the other side of the ocean, Iranian President Ahmadinejad, ysv"z, seems to have the power to lessen the chances of Jewish survival, God forbid. One of the most obvious things in current history is the Iranian leader's program to build a nuclear bomb, and to use it against the Israeli people. He has been very vocal about this in the past, and there is absolutely no reason to assume that he has changed his plans in the meantime. All he has done is learned how to delude a world that seems willing to be deluded, like Prime Minister Chamberlain after meeting with Hitler, ysv"z, in Munich in 1938.

And then there are the Palestinian people, sworn enemies of the Jewish people and determined to remove Israel from the map just as much as the Iranian President is. That is not just rhetoric, those are the words of the Palestinian leaders and their people as well. Anything they have indicated to the contrary has been proven to be blatant lies, through their own words, something for which the Arab world is historically famous, with, as Arafat, ysv"z, liked to say, with the blessing of Mohammed, and billions of gentiles the world over who really believe that Israel is the bad guy.

The thing is that, the situation today looks just as it did to the Jews in Mordechai's time. How could it not? After all, like today, the Jewish people then were in disarray: Assimilation and intermarriage were rampant, and many had no idea how to even learn Chumash. Their understanding of God, Torah, and history, was spiritually unsophisticated, and convincing them to fast for three days to ward off Haman and his Final Solution was as hard then as it would be today to convince 10,000,000 assimilated Jews that all that is happening is God-driven, and designed to bring us back to Him, as the Talmud states:

Rav said: "All the dates of redemption have already passed, and now it depends upon repentance and good deeds." Shmuel said: "It is enough that the mourner remains in mourning!" This is like an earlier disagreement: Rebi Eliezer said: "If the Jewish people will repent then they will be redeemed, and if not then they will not." Rebi Yehoshua said to him: "If they do not repent they will not be redeemed?! Rather, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will cause to rise a king who will make decrees as difficult as Haman's and the Jewish people will repent and return to the right path." (Sanhedrin 97b)

If even religious Jews have a tough time seeing this and being real with it, how much more so secular Jews who don't even believe in Torah, or maybe not even in God or Divine Providence. They firmly believe that seeing is believing, and what they see makes them believe that the enemies of the Jewish people truly have power, and that the Jewish people do not, or at least not enough of it, in spite of what Prime Minister Netanyahu keeps saying about being able to control our own destiny.

The question is, how do we turn all of this into a Megillas Esther-type history? How do we make the events of today seem as comical as they once were, make them result in a real-life redemption of the Jewish people without losing a single Jew along the way? How do we make a Purim story out of the current real-world one?

This is the subject of this week's parshah, the first in Sefer Vayikra. Indeed, it is the subject of the first word of the first parshah, in which a huge lesson about life is packed into a tiny little Aleph.

It is not unlike the story of Kamtza u'Bar Kamtza in the Talmud:

The destruction of Jerusalem came through a Kamtza and a Bar Kamtza in this way. A certain man had a friend Kamtza, and an enemy Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, "Go and bring Kamtza." The man went and brought Bar Kamtza. When the man [who gave the party] found him there he said, "See, you tell tales about me; what are you doing here? Get out." The other said to him: "Since I am here, let me stay, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink."

He said, "No."

"Then let me give you half the cost of the party."

"No," he answered.

"Then let me pay for the whole party."

He still said, "No," and he took him by the hand and threw him out. [Bar Kamtza] said, "Since the rabbis were sitting there and did not stop him, this shows that they agreed with him. I will go and inform against them to the Government."

He went and said to the Emperor, "The Jews are rebelling against you." He said, "How can I tell?"

He told him: "Send them an offering and see whether they will offer it [on the altar]."

So he sent with him a fine calf. While on the way he made a blemish on its upper lip, or as some say on the white of its eye, in a place where [Jews] count it a blemish but [the Romans] do not. The rabbis were inclined to offer it in order not to offend the Government, but Rebi Zechariah ben Abkulas to them: "People will say that blemished animals are offered on the altar." They proposed to kill Bar Kamtza so that he should not go and inform against them, but Rebi Zechariah ben Abkulas said to them, "Is one who makes a blemish on consecrated animals to be put to death?" (Gittin 55b)

Like Megillas Esther, this seems like a contrived story. Unlike Megillas Esther, it has an unhappy

ending, as the Talmud sums up:

It has been taught: Note from this incident how serious a thing it is to put a man to shame, for God supported the cause of Bar Kamtza and destroyed His House and burnt His Temple. (Gittin 57a)

There are many questions that can be asked on this bizarre story, beginning with how such a small error could lead to such a catastrophic result. Then there was Bar Kamtza, who apparently was evil in his own right, so why did God support his cause, and since when does the embarrassment of a single person result in the destruction of the Bais HaMikdosh?

The answer to this question, and many others, is embedded in the story and, unfortunately, is not given the emphasis it certainly deserves:

He [the Emperor] sent Nero the Caesar against them. As he approached [Jerusalem] he shot an arrow towards the east, and it fell in Jerusalem. He then shot one towards the west, and it again fell in Jerusalem. He shot towards all four points of the compass, and each time it fell in Jerusalem. He said to a certain boy: "Repeat to me [the last] verse of Torah you have learned."

He said: " 'And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel' " (Yechezkel 25:14).

He said: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, wishes to lay waste his House and to put the blame on me! He ran away and became a convert . . . (Gittin 56a)

How unusual, no? A Roman general who determines his success in battle by shooting arrows in different directions, and who then interprets a sign that would have meant victory to any other Roman officer to mean success, but with negative consequences? And, as if that weren't strange enough, this Caesar turns to a Jewish child and asks him for the verse he had just learned to confirm his suspicions. Did this story really occur?

Even if it did, and this decorated Roman officer actually got cold feet when attacking the Jewish people, why did he convert to the very people he just proved to himself to be on the verge of destruction? Desert, or something similar, but convert to Judaism? What was he thinking?

It's not clear from the Talmud, but what is clear is that this Roman did something fantastic enough to warrant the following:

Rebi Meir descended from him. (Gittin 56a)

Really? The great Rebi Meir, about whom the Talmud says that all halachah would follow his opinion if we could only just fathom his thought process? What's the connection?

The Aleph from this week's parshah.

What made this Roman convert was that, not only did he believe in the God of the Jewish people, even as a Roman general, but that he did so enough to see the upcoming destruction of the Temple

as Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence, and the fulfillment of prophecy. What he witnessed validated the Torah and all of its promises the Jewish people in the future, all of a sudden making the World-to-Come a real concept, and the proposed slaughter of the Jewish people and destruction of the House of God a despicable act, one certain to exclude him from any kind of eternal life.

That vision, that light, drove him not away from the Jewish people and their immediate and long-term destiny, but towards them. And, as a reward for that incredible level of mental vision, he became the ancestor of the person who was a prism for such light: Rebi Meir Ba'al HaNeis— Rebi Meir, the Miracle Worker.

All of this is alluded to by the small Aleph at the end of the first word of this week's parshah, as Rashi explains:

And He called—vayikra—to Moshe, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. (Vayikra 1:1)

A calling preceded all statements and commandments. It is an expression of love, one that the Ministering Angels use, as it says, "One called to the other" (Yeshayahu 6:3). However, to the gentile prophets He revealed Himself with an expression of happenstance and uncleanness, as it said, "God chanced—vayikar—upon Bilaam" (Bamidbar 23:16). (Rashi)

In a Sefer Torah, in the first verse of Sefer Vayikra, the Hebrew word for, "And He called," spelled: Vav-Yud-Kuf-Raish-Aleph, has an Aleph that is written smaller than the rest of the letters of the word. Thus, the first four letters, Vav-Yud-Kuf-Raish—vayi-kar—stand out, and allude to a different meaning: He chanced upon.

This, tradition tells us, is in order to make a distinction between the way God communicates with Jewish prophets, and the way He communicates with the gentile prophets. Jewish prophets are able to contact God at will, whereas the gentile prophets have to wait for God to contact them, if He does at all. The way in which they deal with Divine Providence, as if it is random, makes their relationship with God random. They see the world as all men do, and therefore experience it on the same level as well.

The small Aleph in this week's parshah tells us that when one tries to see the world through God's eyes, so-to-speak, he can get a God's-eye-view of history. Once he does that, he can begin to see how God works in history, even being able to see how God is weaving redemption even as he allows exile. Over time, and with experience, and continued loyalty to such a vision of life, one is able to see how all of history is really just an extended version of Megillas Esther, as bizarre as that may seem. For, as Dovid HaMelech wrote:

This is from God, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:23).

Then all of history becomes wondrous in our eyes, not just the special events, and we learn to see how God is behind and in control of all of it, and reap all the benefits for living on such a level of

Hashgochah Pratis.

Text

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