



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

God is in My Head

The sidra opens with the words, "When you count the heads of the Children of Israel" (Sh'mot 30:12).

Metaphorically the verse could be read as saying, "When you get inside the head of a Jew".

What does one find inside a Jewish person's head?

The range of answers has many ideas and priorities and there is no guarantee that God has a place.

Nonetheless, more people believe in God than tell you so. Though they reject the "God as grandfather" concept which features a benign old man who smiles and tells you tales of the past, God cannot be pinned down to a stereotype.

God is unique ("I am what I am") and His presence is often suddenly revealed.

The beauty of Nature, the grandeur of the human spirit, the impulse toward truth, justice and peace, the sense of comfort and confidence - all burst upon us as signs of the Divine Presence.

God of my mind,
I reason You exist.

God of my heart,
Your presence comforts me.

God of my memory,
I recall how often You inspired me.

God of my books,
I read the testimony of others.

God of my eyes,
I see Your works.

God of my ears,
I hear Your call.

God of my feet,
I go where You send me.

God of my hand,
I seek my brothers.

God of my guts,
I sense You everywhere.

God of my people,
Your wings protect us.

God of my land,
Your holiness is in every cranny.

God of my nerve,
my courage comes from You.

God of my life,
I am overwhelmed by Your grandeur.

God of my being,
I am upheld by Your greatness.

God of my music,
I sing Your song.

God of my mouth,
I speak Your praise.

Divine Spirit in Art

The sidra introduces us to the names of B'tzalel and Aholiav. They were the ones who designed and created the sanctuary in the wilderness.

Experts at their trade, their skills brought distinction to the Mshkan. Without them, the Israelite camp would have been much poorer. They both deserve HAKARAT HATOV, acknowledgement and appreciation.

But isn't the Torah being more than necessarily generous when it records that God had filled B'tzalel with RU'ACH ELOKIM, the divine spirit? One can imagine the use of such words in relation to a great thinker, teacher, prophet, preacher or poet - but here it is an artist, architect and artisan who is being described so magnanimously.

The explanation must be that there is a spirit of the Divine in all cultural creators, artists, musicians and craftsmen, even mathematicians and scientists. That is, if their principle is not art for art's sake but art for goodness' sake.

It is reported that Cynthia Ozick was asked what made Jewish art, music or literature Jewish, and she is said to have answered, "It has a liturgical quality". The liturgical quality is what is meant by the Divine spirit in art. -oz

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH

How Jewish is the Megila?

God is not mentioned anywhere in the Megila. Jerusalem is only mentioned once.

There are hints of prayer and spirituality, but they are only hints. There is no direct reference to the Temple, Shabbat or the festivals.

Esther seems to keep her Jewishness to herself, not even making it known to her husband. The only individual who is clearly identified as a Jew is Mordechai.

So how can the Megila be considered a Jewish book?

Only because it centers upon the Jewish people, albeit in the Diaspora, relates the irrationality of Jew-hatred and shows that an Unseen Hand is working behind the scenes to save the Jews.

Why then isn't the book frank and open enough to name the Unseen Hand as God?

The commentators all have their theories, and OzTorah has explored them more than once over the years. One thing is certain - even in His apparent absence, God is always present.

It is fully appropriate that the Talmudic rabbis decided that the book was written under the

inspiration and influence of RU'ACH HAKODESH and was to be part of the Tanach.

The Purim Feast

An old rhyme says, "Haman was beat, so let us eat!"

Not just because eating creates a happy mood, but because our survival in ancient Persia followed the royal feast at which Esther secured the cancellation of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews.

But when should we eat?

Most years the Purim SE'UDA (feast) takes place late on Purim afternoon despite the normal rule that mitzvot should not be delayed.

Purim seems an exception to the rule, presumably because the observances of the day include sending gifts of edible foods (MISHLO'ACH MANOT) to one's neighbours and friends, and giving charity to the poor (MATANOT LA'EYONIM). Until these requirements have been met, enabling other people to enjoy the festivities, our own celebrations cannot in all conscience commence.

The Jewish ethos of celebration always says that one must not be selfish or put the needs of others last. This is why every community ensures that the poor have the means to celebrate Pesach and indeed every

happy occasion in the year - especially Shabbat. Some of the greatest acts of quiet charity in Israel enable disadvantaged families to have food and wine for Shabbat.

When Purim falls on a Friday, we have to make sure that the feasting does not get in the way of the observance of Shabbat. Since the SE'UDA can be held at any time during the day, on a Friday it is customary for it to begin earlier than usual. Some communities actually time it for the morning immediately after the Megila reading.

In cities in Israel (notably Jerusalem) which were surrounded by walls at the time of Yehoshua, the SE'UDA is postponed from Shabbat. Extra delicacies are added to the Shabbat meals in honour of Purim, but the SE'UDA itself is on Sunday (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 688:6).

Hey, Man! - An Eccentric Guide to the Purim Cast

Now it came to pass in the land of I-ran (such a frenetic place that everyone runs and no-one has time to walk) that there was such A-hush-veh-rush to get to the king's banquet that the queen's dress was in the Vash ti-ng (the ancient copper) and all she had on was a birthday suit.

"Off with her head!" said the king and then he needed a new queen and among the candidates the bester was Esther and the king found her, crowned her and gowned her.

Now everything was capital in Shushan but every story has a villain and his name was Hey-man because when he entered the palace he said, "Hey, man! I have to see His Maj!" (a good job it wasn't a republic or else he would have wanted to enter the Awful Office and say, "Mister Pres, Simon Says, support the sabras, not the Hez!").

Hey-man had ten sons and he and they played cricket so badly that they were called the Worst Helleven and were such womanisers that they often bowled a maiden over, but when Esther said, "That's not cricket!" and her cousin Mordy Kaye was rude to Hey-man in the street, Hey-man said, "Those are hanging words!"

He tore Mordy's tzitzit and said, "You must be a Jew... no more fringe benefits for you!"

But the king liked Mordy, who was a useful intelligence-gatherer, and he said to him, "I'm going to give you a ring!" ... which he did, Persian to Persian. So he hung up on Hey-man, gave Mordy a job for the boys, told Esther to write a "ganze megillah",

and the Jews had nouvelle cuisine ("gor nisht mit garnish").

Fun, fun - as the song says, "havah nar'ishah, rush rush rush!" It was all very Iranic - no, ironic. The Jews were sorry for the king. Such tzoers so early in his reign... Poor 'im!

Purim Same'ach!