



Walk through the Media
With Rabbi David

PURIM

The Breaking Dawn

Last week I wrote that dark and gloomy nights remind us of Amalek and other Anti-Semites. This week I'm moving forward to discuss the great dawn of salvation or GEULA engineered by Mordechai and Queen Esther. This idea that GEULA is like the dawn is enshrined in Jewish tradition. According to Jewish custom the best possible time to recite the blessing GA'AL YISRAEL (Who redeemed Yisrael), which precedes the morning AMIDA is the exact moment of sunrise.

This theme of the break of day is clearly seen in the Psalm which the Vilna Gaon has taught should be the Psalm of the day for Purim, namely Psalm 22 which begins: For the leader; on AYELET HASHACHAR. A Psalm of David. Before we parse that critical phrase AYELET HASHACHAR, I want to point out that the next verse has also been applied to the Purim story.

'My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?' (22:2). This famous phrase is a powerful expression of an individual in spiritual crisis, and according to the Midrash these were the words Esther was reciting to herself and God, while standing at the

door to the inner court of the king's palace (Esther 5:1). Of course, the King does grant her an audience and all is wonderful for Esther and the Jews.

But back to AYELET HASHACHAR. There are many suggestions for how to parse that phrase. Rashi suggests that it refers to a musical instrument. Some say that the reference is to King David while he was a fugitive running from Shaul, a fleeing hind or AYALA. But most commentaries have settled on this phrase describing the morning sunrise, and particularly the Morning Star called NOGA (Venus), which is probably the true meaning of Esther's Persian name. Her Hebrew name, of course, is Hadassah.

This poetic description of the sunrise is the text source for a famous Talmudic story:

Rebbi Chiya and Rebbi Simeon ben Chalafta were walking in the valley of Arbela before morning and saw 'the morning hind' (AYELET HASHACHAR) as it began to cast rays of sunlight. Rebbi Chiya said to Rebbi Simeon ben Chalafta: Great man, so will be the deliverance of Israel; it starts out very small and grows and radiates as it spreads. What is the reason? When he shall dwell in darkness, the Eternal is my light (Micha 7:8). So also at the beginning of the story Mordechai was sitting at the king's gate (discovered the assassination plot of Bigtan and

Teresh).¹ After that Mordechai returned to the king's gate. After that Haman took the garment and the horse (to lead Mordechai through the streets). After that: Mordechai left the king's presence in royal garb. After that: The Jews had light and joy. (Yerushalmi-Yoma 3:2:3)

The story of Jewish salvation follows a clear trajectory:

1. Mordechai discovers the plot on the King's life,
2. Mordechai is rewarded for that act of bravery by being led through the streets on the King's horse and adorned with the King's royal garb,
3. After the downfall of Haman our scourge, Mordechai departs the palace in his very own magnificent clothing (garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen, Esther 8:15), and, finally,
4. For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor (8:16).

Phase 4 is the redemption. When the Jews awoke the morning after the second banquet, which Esther hosted for Achashveirosh and Haman, they arose to a brand new world, a new dawn. The enemy was vanquished and hanged; Mordechai was resplendent as the morning sun. The Jews had light, gladness, joy and respect!

Our Sages famously explain those

four expressions for the Jewish people's newly found hope in the following manner:

Rav Yehuda said: ORA, 'Light' is the Torah. And similarly it says: 'For the mitzva is a lamp and the Torah is light' (Mishlei 6:23). SIMCHA 'Gladness'; this is referring to the Festivals, as in: 'And you shall be glad [V'SAMACHTA] on your Festival' (D'varim 16:14). SASON, 'Joy'; this is circumcision. And similarly it says: "I rejoice [SAS] at Your word" (T'hilim 119:162), which the Sages understood as referring to David's rejoicing over the mitzva of circumcision. Y'KAR, "Honor"; this refers to TEFILIN. (Bavli, Megila 16b)

Rav Yeshayahu Horowitz (Shnei Luchot HaBrit) explained that this quartet of terms signifies a new, voluntary acceptance of the Torah. This reaffirmation of our commitment to God and Torah as encompassing both body and soul, physical and spiritual. He further elucidated that Haman desired to destroy both our spirituality (Torah), and our physical existence by his order 'to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews - young and old, women and children' (Esther 3:13).

This is why Haman described his plan as L'HASHMID (to destroy) and LAHAROG (to kill). The word L'HASHMID alludes to the destruction of the Jews as a spiritual force,

whereas the word LAHAROG, refers to the physical death of the Jews.

The S'fat Emet added to that idea that Haman's primary objective was to destroy the Torah. He explains that for this reason the Jews of the Persian Empire saw the importance of re-accepting the Torah. As the redemption unfolded, the Jews, many of whom had moved away from Torah and Mitzvot, saw that they could only achieve the 4 levels, 'light and gladness; joy and honor', by eradicating all vestige of Amalek, our arch enemy and Haman's people.

It's also possible to see those four stages as four levels of human fulfillment. We should notice that it's possible to align those four phases with the Mitzvot of Purim. Light is the reading of the Megilla (KI TORAH OHR, 'that Torah is light', Mishlei 6:23), gladness is the Purim Seuda (EIN SIMCHA ELA B'BASAR V'YAYIN, 'there is no happiness other than meat and wine', Pesachim 109a); joy is giving MISHLO'ACH MANOT (distributing food portions); and honor is MATANOT LA'EVYOLNIM (monetary gifts to the poor). Because in Judaism, no one can truly be happy if others are suffering.

So, have a wonderful Purim by basking in the 'light and joy', but also realize that true happiness must be shared. Purim Same'ach! 🍷