



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

NURTURING BELIEF IN GOD IN OUR POST-SINAI WORLD

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET



Judaism is unique in that connection to belief in God goes deeper than just the intellect. It's all about the relationship. Consider the very first commandment given to the Jewish People when we left Egypt:

SOURCE 1: *First of the 10 Commandments, Exodus (20:2)*

I am the Lord, your God who **brought you out of the land of Egypt**, the house of bondage:

אֲנִכִּי יְיָ-הוֹדֶה אֶלֶּהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

This is the first commandment requiring us to believe in God, who introduces Himself as the God who took us out of Egypt.

Q: Why does God introduce himself as the One who took us out of Egypt rather than as the Creator of the Universe? Isn't that a much grander demonstration of his power and omnipotence?

From the very beginning of Jewish History, God presents Himself as a personal God, who is intimately involved with us as a nation and as individuals and cares deeply about us.

Pesach was a time of open miracles and we accepted the Torah from this vantage point. But what about a time when God wasn't so apparent to the Jewish People. Take, for example, the dark days before the Purim miracle, when the Jews were exiled from the land of Israel and threatened with annihilation at the hands of Haman.

This dire circumstance is alluded to in the very name of the Purim heroine Esther:

SOURCE 2: *The Name of Esther in Purim Story, Talmud Chulin 139b*

Where is "Esther" alluded to in the Torah? As it is written, "I will surely hide My countenance on that day" Deuteronomy (31:18)

אֶסְתֵּר מִן הַתּוֹרָה מִנִּין וְאֵנִי הֶסְתֵּר אֶסְתִּיר
פָּנַי בְּיוֹם הַהוּא

Q: Why do you think we know her as Esther, which means hidden, when her real name was Hadassah?

Perhaps, the name Esther is a hint to a time when God will be hiding and the Jewish People will seemingly be at the mercy of our enemies.

Q: Moreover, throughout the Scroll of Esther God's name is not mentioned explicitly once, even though the Scroll of Esther is the last book of the Bible. Why do you think that is? Is God not part of the story?

Q: Who is the arch enemy of the Purim story bent on the destruction of the Jewish People? What is his connection to the Jewish People?

He is actually a descendent of Esav, the evil brother of our forefather Yaacov, who so many years earlier sought to destroy him (Yaacov).

Take a look at the following sources and try to discern the tactics which Haman employs to eradicate the Jewish People:

SOURCE 3: *Midrash Vayikra Rabba / Megillas Esther 9:24-26*

3a. Esav is the root of evil in this world and his **essence is separation**. He himself was "scattered and separated;" his powers were scattered and not unified. The power to defeat Esav is unity. (Vayikra Raba (4))

3b. "For Haman ...the enemy of the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews and had cast a "Pur" – "a lot" to terrify and destroy them...That is why they called these days "Purim" from the word Pur - a lot. (Megillas Esther 9:24-26)

Randomness is a scattering of points or occurrences without any discernable pattern of meaning, like Haman throwing a lot to determine an auspicious time to annihilate the Jews.

Q: (i) Why do you suppose these are the weapons antisemites use against the Jewish People and (ii) Why would Mordechai and Esther name the holiday after them?

Consider the following source for more insight into this question:

SOURCE 4: *An Overview: The Period and the Miracle R. Nosson Sherman Artscroll - The Megillah*

The feast (beginning of story) was in the third year of Achashveirosh's reign and the decree of extermination was in the twelfth year (the end of the story). What could be the connection?

It was then that the pieces of God's jigsaw puzzle began to come together.

Q: The Purim story stretches over a decade, yet it reads as if it took place in little more than a year. Why?

By stringing together, the truly prophetic moments over this decade, they "connected the dots" for us, revealing the unmistakable Hand of God.

By calling the holiday Purim, they were taking a "tongue in cheek" swipe at the philosophy of Haman - you think everything is random and there is no God, I'll use your dice and show you "they are loaded." Everything you attributed to chance and happenstance God used to orchestrate the deliverance of the Jewish People.

Mordechi and Esther were the last of the prophets and this book was the final prophetic story in the Bible. Henceforth, our relationship with God was going to work with Him working behind the curtain, guiding and loving us, but in a hidden way. No more open miracles, but using “divine providence,” to take care of us.

The impact upon the Jewish People was profound.

SOURCE 5: *Talmud Bavli Rashi.*

5a. Rabbah said, “Nonetheless, they later accepted the Torah [willingly] in the days of Achashveirosh, as it says, ‘The Jews affirmed and accepted upon themselves’ – they affirmed what they had already accepted (at Mount Sinai on Shavuot).”

5b. Rashi: “**In the days of Achashveirosh**” – stemming from **the love of the miracle** performed on their behalf.

אמר רבא אעפ"כ הדור קבלוה בימי
אחשורוש דכתיב קימו - וקבלו היהודים
קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר

בימי אחשורוש - מאהבת הנס שנעשה
להם

The Jewish people now accepted the Torah willingly because they felt God’s direct love for them through the Purim miracle.

At Mt. Sinai we entered into a covenant with God because of the open miracles that He performed for us. In a way, we had to do it. What was our alternative?

However, in the times of Purim we saw clearly how God was involved with our lives in the “hidden miracles” that permeate our natural world. That left a tremendous impact upon us. R. Shimon Pinchas makes this point while addressing why God’s name is missing from the Megillah:

SOURCE 6: *R. Shimshon Pinchas, Essay on Purim*

This is also the reason for which none of the names of God are mentioned in Megillas Esther. Since if His name would be written explicitly, this would constitute a departure from the natural into the supernatural – which is applicable only to Passover. **Purim, however, reveals that each aspect within nature itself is imbued with the love of God ...** Where does one find more intense love: in Passover or in Purim? On Passover God raised us over the entire world, but on **Purim we discover God in every nook and cranny of the natural world.**

From that time onward we dance our own private dance with God, as a nation, and as individuals. However, to maintain our free will, God leaves it up to us how cognizant of the dance we will be.

Consider the following source:

SOURCE 7: *The Burning Bush, Book of Exodus (3:3)*

Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?"
When ה-ו-ה saw that he had turned aside to look,
God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!"
He answered, "Here I am."

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמֵּרְאָה
הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסִּנֵּה:

וַיֵּרָא יְ-ה-וָה כִּי סָר לְרִאיוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו
אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

Q: Why do you think Moshe merited that God would appear to him? Take a look at the verse to see if it hints at an answer.

R. Yerucham Levovitz explains that we have an obligation to follow after God's providence. If we don't try to see it, then we won't experience any providence, and we won't even know what providence is. If, however, one does try to see providence, he will immediately see it in every single step. This was the secret of Moshe's experience with God. God saw that he turned to look, and as a result God called to him.

Q: Do you "turn to see" God in your life, or do you see things on face value, as just the way things are?

Q: How can you be more mindful of God's messages in your life?

God isn't only in the good things that happen to you, His Hand is in everything. The more you see His Hand in your life, the greater your relationship and the greater your trust.

Q: How would knowing God is behind everything help you deal with unpleasant situations?

Q: Do you think that noticing God in the good times would help you weather the not so good times, and feel His comforting presence there as well.

Exercise for Gaining Sensitivity to Divine Providence:

1. Whenever something happens that you may have chalked up to a coincidence, notice that it is a message from God and write it down.
2. Review your messages weekly on Shabbos.
3. On Rosh Chodesh, the first of every Jewish month, review the divine providence for the month.