



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

PURIM IS FOREVER

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Although Purim is a holiday that was enacted by the Rabbis in the times of Mordechai and Esther, its roots are deep, mystical, and of great significance. Consider the following source which links Purim to Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar:

SOURCE 1: YOM KIPPUR IS "LIKE" THE DAY OF PURIM -
("YOM HAKIPPURIM" IS THE FULL NAME OF THE HOLIDAY)

Yom Kippur is "like" the day of Purim: in future times, Yom Kippur, too, will be a day of rejoicing. It is called "Purim" because of Yom HaKippurim (which can be read as **"the day that is like Purim"**), for, in the future, people will rejoice on Yom Kippur, and will transform its required afflictions to delight... (Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkun 21)

פורים אתקריאת על שם יום הכפורים דעתידין לאתענגא ביה ולשנויי ליה מענוי לענג

The Zohar, which is the principal work of the Kabbalah, makes the link between Yom HaKippurim and Purim, because the holy day can be translated literally as **Yom (the day) – K'Purim (like Purim)**.

Question: How can one even compare the two holidays? One is an austere fast day, while the other is a raucous day of feasting!

Also, not only are they compared, but some suggest that since Yom Kippur is only "like Purim," it is actually on a lower level than Purim! Astonishing, isn't it?

Question: In what way can you imagine that Purim, a Rabbinic enactment, is on a higher level than the holy biblically ordained holiday of Yom HaKippurim (Yom Kippur)?

One answer may be that while on both days we achieve tremendous closeness (oneness) to Hashem, Purim is considered higher because we achieve this level while fully immersed in the physical world, which is what we were created for! Remember, on Yom Kippur we are gifted the status of "angels for a day," while on Purim we retain the status of normal human beings.

Let's look at another fascinating source which underscores the significance of the Holiday:

SOURCE 2A: PURIM IS FOREVER

All the festivals are destined to be nullified (in the Messianic Era), **but the days of Purim will never be nullified**, as it is written, "These days of Purim will never leave the Jewish People, and their memory will not be lost to its children." (Megillah 9:28)

וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו מתוך היהודים וזכרם לא יסוף מזרעם

Question: The holiday of Purim was enacted by the Rabbis and its miracle seems to pale in comparison to those experienced by our ancestors at the Exodus from Egypt! Why would one think that the miracles of Purim should be celebrated for all eternity?

The continuation of the midrash adds another wrinkle to this strong question:

SOURCE 2B: YOM HAKIPPURIM IS FOREVER

... In addition, **Yom Kippur will never be nullified**, as the verse states, "And this will be for you an eternal statute." (Vayikra/Leviticus 16:34)

Not only do we learn that Purim will be celebrated forever, but Yom Kippur as well. That's surprising since Yom Kippur would seem to be less relevant in messianic times as evil is eradicated, and the need for atonement from sin is diminished. Also, Purim celebrates a clear miracle of deliverance by G-d of the Jewish People, while Yom Kippur does not.

Question: What miracle is commemorated by Yom Kippur, and what relevance does it have to the Messianic Era?

Perhaps we are commemorating the miracle of teshuva, which involves changing one's fundamental nature. We are used to it, but it certainly is a miracle! Also, we associate messianic times with the destruction of evil in the world. On Yom Kippur there is a similar nullification of evil and an experience of redemption, albeit internal and often all too short-lived, which does remind us of the World to Come.

At any rate, Purim and Yom HaKippurim seem to be deeply connected.

Before we explore this connection more fully, let's look at one other aspect of Purim to explain its enduring significance:

SOURCE 3: THE TORAH WAS REACCEPTED ON PURIM

The **acceptance of the Torah at Sinai was based on fear, in contrast to that of Purim.** "And they stood at the foot of the mountain." (Shemot 19:17) This teaches that G-d suspended the mountain [of Sinai] above them like a barrel and said, "If you accept the Torah, good; and if you do not, here will be your death." Rav Acha Bar Yaakov said, "From here there is a great excuse for [the Jews not having kept] the Torah. (The Jews could contend that their acceptance of the Torah was under duress, and therefore, they would not be liable for not abiding by it. Rashi) Rabbah said, **"Nonetheless, they later accepted it [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. The Jews affirmed and accepted upon themselves, and their progeny, and upon all who join them, that they should without fail celebrate these two days according to their writing and their time, every year.** (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a)

Several questions emerge from this enigmatic piece of Talmud:

Question: According to the source, why did the Jewish People reaccept the Torah on Purim, and what was really the need to do so?

Question: The fact that the Torah "needed" to be reaccepted implies that this second acceptance was on an even higher level than the first. How could that be?

At Sinai, the Jews heard G-d speak, an experience the likes of which has never been duplicated before, nor since, in world history. The Megillah, which records the Purim narrative, doesn't even mention the name of G-d even once! When one adds in all the miracles in Egypt and the splitting of the Red Sea, which G-d did for our ancestors, it is hard to imagine any other experience which would evoke a greater response by the Jewish People! Yet the Megillah hints that the second acceptance was on a higher level than the first.

To unravel this puzzle, let's focus on the explanation given by the Talmud above as explained by the primary biblical commentator Rashi:

SOURCE 4: RASHI ON TALMUD SHABBAT 88A

Rashi commenting on the verse above in Source #3, **"In the days of Achashveirosh," (to mean stemming) from the love of the (Purim) miracle performed on their behalf.**

בימי אחשורוש - מאהבת הנס שנעשה להם

Rashi informs us that the reacceptance of the Torah stemmed from the outpouring of love from the Jewish People to G-d caused by their miraculous deliverance from Haman "in the days of Achashveirosh."

Question: What makes the Purim story so unique that it caused an outpouring of love for G-d not experienced at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (when G-d performed an even greater array of miracles)?

Let's look at one more source from the Talmud elucidating a famous verse from the Prophet Zechariah, which should lead us to an answer:

SOURCE 5: TALMUD PESACHIM 50A "ON THAT DAY HIS NAME WILL BE ONE"

The Rabbis are puzzled by the verse in Zechariah (14:9) **"On that day (Messianic Era) Hashem will be One and His Name will be One"** and ask, only in the future will His Name be One? (Implying now it is not One.) This world is not like the messianic world. Now, upon **hearing good news, we say, "Blessed is the One who is Good and does Good,"** and upon **hearing bad news we say, "Blessed is the True Judge."** In the World to Come (messianic times), **we will only say "Blessed is the One Who is Good and does Good."**

"וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי ה' אֶחָד וְשִׁמוֹ אֶחָד." אִטּוֹ הָאֵידֵנָא לֹא אֶחָד הוּא? אָמַר רַבִּי אֲחָא בַר חֲנִינָא: לֹא כְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, עַל בְּשׁוּרוֹת טוֹבוֹת אוֹמְרִים: "בְּרוּךְ הַטוֹב וְהַמְטִיב", וְעַל בְּשׁוּרוֹת רָעוֹת אוֹמְרִים: "בְּרוּךְ דִּיּוֹן הָאֱמֶת." לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, כּוּלּוֹ "הַטוֹב וְהַמְטִיב".

Every day we say this verse from Zechariah in the Aleynu prayer, beseeching Hashem to bring the Messianic Era so that "Hashem will be One and His Name will be One." In that future perfected world, we will understand with clarity that ALL that G-d does is for our good.

Question: Question: How do we see this concept expressed through the events of Purim?

Purim gave us a taste of this very same clarity that all of G-d's actions are good, even when they appear to be bad for us at the time. Seeing that every aspect of His Providence was in actuality an expression of His mercy and love for us, filled the Jewish People with an incredible love for G-d, which was the springboard for accepting the Torah once again. Yet this time, the acceptance would be with a full heart, because it was motivated not just by fear (as at Mount Sinai), but by an overwhelming feeling of love for G-d.

When the underlying force of G-d's good will no longer be hidden from us, and evil is finally removed from the world, all of the world will see and know that G-d is One. Purim gave us a sneak preview of this process and how He really runs the world, and that is why its message is eternal.

One question remains. Why will we celebrate Yom Kippur also forever?

It, too, must contain an expression of G-d's Unity and His love for us.

Question: What similarities do you see between Purim and Yom Kippur, linking them in this way forever?

Some say they are two halves of one whole. Purim reflects the unity of G-d through full immersion in our physical world, while Yom Kippur underscores our connection to G-d only through the spiritual. Also, while Purim describes the destruction of evil on a macro level, on Yom Kippur we find the nullification of evil – expressed through wiping away our sins – on a micro level.

Let's take a look at the following source to discover yet another aspect of the connection of Purim to Yom Kippur:

SOURCE 6: ATONEMENT OF YOM KIPPUR COMES THROUGH G-D'S ATTRIBUTE OF UNITY

The revelation of Hashem's Oneness in the Messianic Era comes purely through His desire to do good. (For My Sake [alone], I will do...Isaiah 48:11). **Every year this desire (of G-d) is made manifest on the day of Yom Kippur. This unique power** expressed through Yom Kippur is **Hashem's Oneness (His consistent merciful desire to benefit us)**, even if according to our actions alone, we don't deserve it. Through the power of Oneness, "I erase your sins for My Sake," Hashem forgives us and removes the impurities that our mistakes cause, an incredible kindness shown to us. Now we can understand the connection between the "One Day" of the Messianic Era, and the "One Day" of Yom Kippur. **In both periods, Hashem is One in His world, and nothing is allowed to get in the way of His Will and love for us.**

(Sifsei Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Vol. 1, p. 276)

Both Yom Kippur and Purim live forever because they demonstrate vividly Hashem's Oneness, His consistent love for the Jewish People which is the hallmark of the Messianic Era.

Question: How do you see Hashem's consistent love for you and for the Jewish People, even in our world, where He is often hidden?

This year when you hear the Megillat Esther in the Synagogue, pay close attention to all the details of Hashem's salvation of the Jewish People. See how many things happened at the beginning of the story, which seemed either bad or neutral, and how they all were transformed into vehicles for our deliverance! On Yom Kippur, appreciate the amazing opportunity Hashem gives us to start again with a clean slate, receiving yet another chance to achieve our dreams and aspirations, and to feel the loving kindness of our Creator.

SUMMARY OF THE PURIM STORY

COURTESY OF NCSY

355 BCE - MASS GENOCIDE ON JEWS

THE STATE OF JEWISH LIFE: The Jews were in a hard place.

- It was the first time in 850 years that the Jews were in exile after being in Israel.
- The Temple was destroyed, after standing for 410 years.
- 1,000 years of prophecy came to an end.

The Prophet Jeremiah said the exile would last 70 years.

Achashverosh saw the Jews weren't redeemed after 70 years, so he held a 6-month feast.

- He invited the Jews.
- Wore the High Priest's garments and served food out of the Temple goblets.
- This was a disgrace to the Jews.

Achashverosh was drunk and orders Vashti (his queen) to show up at the party dressed immodestly. When she refuses, Achashverosh orders her death.

King Achashverosh then held a beauty contest to find a new wife. Esther, a beautiful Jewish girl, is chosen to be queen. Esther is an orphan, being raised by Mordechai.

During this time, two palace guards (Bigshan and Seresh) plot to assassinate the king.

- Mordechai overhears them outside the palace gates and gets them eliminated.
- This saves the king's life.

9 YEARS LATER...

Haman was promoted to become advisor to King Achashverosh.

- He had power to issue any decree.
- He made everyone in the kingdom bow down to him.
- Everyone bowed down to him, except for Mordechai.

Enraged by Mordechai's refusal to bow down, Haman took his rage out on the entire Jewish people.

- Haman convinced Achashverosh that the entire Jewish nation is a threat.
- Haman legislated a pogrom against the Jewish people.
- He cast a lot and chose a day to wipe out the Jews.

The Jews are in a horrible, terrified state. They are scared, they pray, rally the troops, protest. How can they defend themselves against a kingdom of 127 nations?

Achashverosh can't sleep.

- He calls his advisors to read from the Book of Records.
- The book opens to the part where Mordechai saves the king's life.

- At same time, Haman comes in to say he wants to kill Mordechai.
- Achashverosh says: No way! We should do the exact opposite: Take him on a horse dressed in royal robes and parade him through the streets!

Mordechai tells Esther: "Now is your moment. Go save the Jews!"

- Esther was scared to go speak to King Achashverosh without being specifically called. Anyone who does this is normally put to death.
- Mordechai tells her: "If we are meant to be saved, G-d will save us, a different way... but maybe this is your destiny! Maybe this is why you were chosen to be queen!"

LESSON 1:

- Mordechai teaches Esther a fundamental lesson in Judaism: Each of us has our own role to play. We are part of a bigger picture, a piece in a puzzle. We each have a story line. Will we rise to the challenge? We each have a toolbox, family, friends, personalities... take those and discover yourself, discover your role, be the heroine in your story. Be the Esther.

Esther makes a big banquet and reveals she's a Jew and tells the king about Haman's plot. The king is shocked and hangs Haman.

The day of the planned attack (13 Adar), Achashverosh grants the Jews the right to defend themselves. The Jews defeat their enemies.

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY COMES TRUE.

LESSON 2:

- Where was G-d in this story? How many times was his name mentioned in Megillah? G-d's name is not mentioned in the Megillah at all. It seems to be a series of events that "just happened." Was our salvation all just a coincidence? In Judaism, we don't believe in coincidences. The Lesson of Purim is: G-d is here even when we don't see Him. No open miracles happened, but it was G-d who created the series of events that led to our redemption. The holiday is called "Purim" because it refers to the lots ("pur") that Haman cast. Haman thought we had no G-d in our life, bleak time for the Jews, he can wipe them out by a role of the dice... he learned the hard way... don't mess with the Jews!

Mordechai declares a holiday fostering Jewish unity.

- We come together and hear the Megillah.
- We give gifts to friends.
- We give money to the poor.
- We celebrate with a lavish feast.