

Foreword

The holiday of Purim and the Book of Esther have several unique features that make this book of Tanakh and this holiday distinct from all others:

1. The Book of Esther is the only book in Tanakh that does not have the name of God mentioned in it.
2. The Rambam writes in the *Laws of Megillah and Chanukah* (2:18) the following:
All the Books of the Prophets and those of Ketuvim (Books and the Sacred Writings) will cease [to be part of the canonized text] during the messianic era except the Book of Esther. It will continue to exist just as the Five Books of the Torah and the laws of the Oral Torah that will never cease. Although ancient troubles will be remembered no longer, as it is written "The 'troubles of the past are forgotten and hidden from my eyes" (Isaiah 65:16), the days of Purim will not be abolished, as it is written: "These days of Purim shall never be repealed among the Jews, and the memory of them shall never cease from their descendants" (Esther 9:28).
3. Many rabbinic masters translate *Yom ha-Kippurim*, the Hebrew name for the Day of Atonement, as a play on words. They suggest that the name means *Yom Ki-Purim*—"The Day of Atonement should be like Purim" (see the comments of the Vilna Gaon in *Likutei HaGra* (Warsaw) p. 308, and the writings of Rav Hutner in *Pachad Yitzchak*, Purim, *inyan* 6:6, 8, 11, 21: 1). What is the connection between the Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the year, and the day of Purim, which is marked by joy, laughter, the exchange of food and drink, and the mandate to feast?

The Rambam gives special notice to the Book of Esther, recognizing that its role will continue even during messianic times, for this book of the Bible is the key to bringing the Messiah. Nowhere in the Megillah do we see Mordechai or Esther receiving direct instructions from Hashem. Yet their courage and tenacity is based on their commitment to the values of Torah; their actions are not predicated on inspirational prophecy but something more important: an inner conviction to the norms and mores of Judaism. What will bring the messianic days and what will be celebrated in its eternal era? It is the capacity to transform reality through the inner voice of Torah ideals that the Jew must feel in his or her heart. The Book of Esther may not have God's name in it, but the experience is so critical and so transformational that the Rambam suggests that it will be celebrated even after the coming of the Messiah. The spiritual connection between Purim and the Day of Atonement is not predicated on similar ritual practices. Instead, it reflects the recognition that *Yom ha-Kippurim* is a successful religious experience **only** when the spiritual connection that the Jews in the Book of Esther were able to discover and act upon, a personal and communal rendezvous with God, also occurs on our High Holidays. The "at-one-ment" with God that happened in Shushan, the ability for the community to feel God's presence in their very beings, is the same transformative experience that we wish for ourselves on the High Holidays.

It is with this spirit that our rabbis engage in on a daily basis. Whether as synagogue rabbanim, rabbeim, heads of school, chaplains in the army and hospitals, or as communal lay leaders, our musmakhim are the custodians of our tradition and are committed to imbuing it with passion and relevance. They heed the calling of Mordechai (Esther 4: 14) that we dare not be silent in our lives, for we have the wonderful opportunity to shape our own destinies, that of the Jewish people, and the world community.

The Chag HaSemikhah is not the culmination of our relationship with our students; it is just the beginning of the next chapter. We wish our new musmakhim only success in their endeavors.

Mazal Tov and Purim Sameiach,

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