

Accepting the Torah through Hidden Miracles

The holiday of Purim is certainly associated with happiness and rejoicing over the salvation that the Jewish people enjoyed in the days of the Persian Empire. It is also known as a day in which the Torah was reaccepted willingly. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) tells us:

ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר, אמר רב אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא: מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם. אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: מכאן מודעא רבה לאורייתא. אמר רבא: אף על פי כן, הדור קבלוה בימי אחשוורוש. דכתיב קימו וקבלו היהודים, קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר.

“And they stood at the lowermost part of the mount” (Exodus 19:17). Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: [the verse] teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above them like a barrel, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Aha bar Ya’akov said: From here is a substantial caveat to [the obligation to fulfill] the Torah. Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: “They ordained and took upon them...” (Esther 9:27); they ordained what they had already taken upon themselves.

The Gemara teaches us that our first acceptance of the Torah was flawed, since it was forced upon us. We therefore reaccepted it in the days



Rabbi Yehuda Balsam

Faculty, DRS Yeshiva High School

Woodmere, NY

of Purim, as the Megilah hints to us by telling us, *“kimu v’kiblu,”* (Esther 9:27) we upheld and accepted the days of Purim, as opposed to merely accepting them. Thus, the acceptance of Purim constitutes an upholding of our original *kabbalas haTorah*. How is this so? The Maharal (*Chiddushei Aggados* ad. loc. and *Tiferes Yisrael* chap. 35) explains that when B’nei



Yisrael accepted the new holiday of Purim, they demonstrated a tacit approval of their acceptance of the entire Torah. One who is obligated to perform unwanted tasks and is under the strain of heavy burdens would surely not voluntarily choose to increase his workload. By agreeing to add to their extensive list of obligations and restrictions,

the Jews demonstrated that they view the Torah as a privilege and an opportunity for spiritual growth and achievement, and not as a yoke that was thrust upon their collective neck.

Based on this approach, we can answer the questions of the Ramban (ad loc. s.v. *V’ha*). He wonders why the Jews were punished for their sins and exiled from the land if they had never, in fact, accepted the Torah. The Ramban himself answers that although B’nei Yisrael lacked a formal acceptance, they were still benefitting from the blessings and promises within the Torah. In order to continue to reap its rewards, they were obligated to uphold the mitzvos as their end of the deal.

However, with the Maharal’s thesis in mind, we can suggest that the Jews had indeed accepted the Torah at Har Sinai. Nevertheless, since its presentation was done in a way that seemed “forced,” one could claim that they had never truly agreed to take it. Thus the acceptance of Purim served as proof that the Jews were indeed fully satisfied with the agreement that had been made all those years ago, and a new acceptance was not necessary.

This idea can be taken to the next level based on the comments of the *Meshech Chochmah* (Dev. 19:17 s.v. *Vayisyatzvu*). He suggests that the words of Chazal, that Hashem suspended the mountain above our heads, are not meant to be taken literally. Rather, the revelation at Sinai was so intense and impressive, it made abundantly clear to all the Jews that the world had been created specifically for this moment and this mission. Thus B'nei Yisrael were left with no free will to possibly refuse the Torah, because that would be tantamount to rejecting life itself. The *Meshech Chochmah's* explanation of these events gives us further insight into the greatness of the acceptance of Purim. The problem inherent in the *kabbalas haTorah* at Sinai is that it was presented in conjunction with awesome and powerful miracles. Hashem's glory descended to our world and demonstrated that there is no other path in life for our nation than that of the Torah, thereby tainting the purity of our *kabbalah*. Therefore, Purim constitutes the perfect solution to this deficiency. Not only was the new holiday accepted willingly by the Jewish people, but its mere recognition as a miracle demonstrated the nation's desire to see the hand of God in everyday events. Indeed, we are aware that the name of Hashem does not appear anywhere in the Megilah. It is certainly possible to view the Purim story as a tale of political maneuvering and espionage. Our recognition that Hashem was behind the curtain pulling the strings of each of the players is a product of

our understanding that everything in our lives is subject to direct divine providence and intervention. Thus, the problem of the Torah being given with open miracles is solved by the Jewish people's celebration of the hidden miracles that protect us always and provided for our salvation at that time.

Based on this idea, we can perhaps understand a particular position of the Rambam. The Gemara (*Megilah* 14a, *Arachin* 10b) offers three reasons why Hallel is not recited on Purim: First, we do not recite Hallel over a miracle that takes place in the diaspora. Second, reading the Megilah constitutes the recitation of Hallel. Third, we were still servants of Achashverosh following the Purim story.

The Meiri (s.v. *Davar*) writes that if one is to accept the second answer, that we do recite Hallel on Purim in the form of the Megilah, then one who finds himself without a Megilah on Purim is obligated to recite the regular Hallel. However, the Rambam (*Hilchos Megilah* 3:6) overtly accepts the second approach, stating that the chachamim did not establish the recitation of Hallel on Purim because the Megilah is Hallel. However, he makes no mention of the Meiri's ruling for one who lacks the ability to read the Megilah. Indeed, the fact that he writes that Hallel was not instituted on Purim indicates that one would not recite Hallel under any circumstances.

To explain this ruling, it is necessary to see another comment of the Gemara (*Shabbos* 118b). The

Talmud cites a statement of Rabbi Yosi Haglili that it is extremely positive to recite Hallel every day. The Gemara questions this practice as being tantamount to blasphemy and explains that there are two types of Hallel. The main Hallel is to be recited only on special occasions, but the Hallel to which Rabbi Yosi Haglili refers to is Pesukei D'zimra. What we see from this Gemara is that Pesukei D'zimra contains praises of Hashem that are to be recited regularly, as they differ from those in the holiday version of Hallel. The Hallel of Yom Tov praises Hashem for the open miracles that He performs and should therefore not be recited on a regular basis, as these miracles are extremely rare. Pesukei D'zimra, on the other hand, thanks God for the everyday nissim, and allows us to appreciate the seemingly mundane natural occurrences as work of the divine hand. Perhaps the same can be said for the Rambam's opinion. Chazal did not establish the recitation of Hallel on Purim, since Purim is the celebration of the hidden miracle. Reading the Megilah itself, not as a mundane story, but as a *pirsum haneis*, a demonstration of God's providence in our lives, is the only appropriate and effective Hallel that should be recited on Purim.

May we merit internalizing the messages of Purim learn to appreciate the hidden miracles in our lives, and merit to see the day that God reveals Himself with the ultimate redemption.



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