

PURIM: A REENACTMENT OF SINAI

In celebration of the incredible miracle that took place in the Purim story, Mordechai and Esther formulated the holiday that commemorates our national salvation:

על פן הַיְהוּדִים הַפְּרָזִים הַיִּשְׁבִּים בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרָזוֹת
עֲשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אֲדָר שְׂמֵחָה
וּמְשֻׁתָּה וְיוֹם טוֹב וּמְשֻׁלוֹחַ מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ.

That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another.

Esther 9:19

One of the most defining features of this holiday is the mitzvah of *mishloach manos* — sending gifts to one another. There is a well-known debate between the *Manos Halevi* (commentary to 9:19) and the *Terumas Hadeshen* (111) regarding the nature of this mitzvah. Is the purpose to generate a broader sense of unity among the Jewish people, or is it more particular to the Purim experience — a mandate of interpersonal responsibility to ensure that the entire community has the requisite resources to enjoy the Purim feast?

Rav Yitzchak Hunter, in his work *Pachad Yitzchak* (31), notes the unique nature of this mitzvah on Purim. Generally, the mandate for Jewish unity finds expression in interactions that take place between individuals. Purim is unique in that this ambition is ritualized into a

formal halachic requirement, infusing the chag with an energized social dimension of communal connectivity. Rav Hutner wonders why this approach to unity is found specifically in the celebration of Purim, in contrast to the many other chagim that commemorate national salvation.

The *Pachad Yitzchak* explains that Purim celebrates not only the salvation of the Jewish people, but the religious revival that it inspired.

וַיִּתְעַבּוּ בַתְּחִיתָהּ הָהָר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַר
חַמָּא בַר חֲסָא מִלְּמַד שְׁכַפָּה הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הָהָר כְּגִיגִית וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם
אַתֶּם מִקְּבָלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוֹטֵב וְאִם לֹא שֵׁם
תֵּהָא קְבוּרַתְכֶם אָמַר רַב אַחָא בַר יַעֲקֹב מִכָּאן
מוֹדַעָא רַבָּה לְאוּרֵייתָא אָמַר רַבָּא אֵף עַל פִּי
כֵּן הַדוֹר קְבֻלוּהּ בִּימֵי אַחְשׁוּרוּשׁ דְּכֹתִיב קִימוּ
וּקְבֻלוּ הַיְהוּדִים קִימוּ מַה שְׁקִיבְלוּ כְּבָרָה.

"They stood at the bottom of the mountain." Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, covered them with the mountain like an [overturned] vat. And He said to them, "If you accept the Torah, good. And if not, there will be your burial." Rav Acha bar Yaakov said, from here is a strong signal [of coercion] regarding [acceptance of] the Torah. Rava said: Nevertheless, they accepted it anew in the times of Achashveirosh as it states "The Jews fulfilled and they accepted," they fulfilled what they already accepted.

Shabbos 88a

The existential threat to the Jewish people was ultimately rooted in the deterioration of their loyalty to Torah

observance, as depicted by their participation in Achashveirosh's party at the outset of the Megillah. The salvation of Am Yisroel was greeted by a renewed commitment to the values and ideals of our Torah and a re-creation of the Sinai experience — the original moment of our embracing G-d's word. Rav Hutner explains that one of the defining features of the original *kabalas Hatorah* was the unity of the Jewish people:

וַיְחַן שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל. כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד
“And there Israel encamped [in front of Mount Sinai]” — as one man and with one heart.

Rashi, Shemos 19:2

Purim, as a reenacting of the commitment of *kabalas Hatorah*, also necessitates this dimension of unity. The mitzvah of *mishloach manos* is intended to serve as the *ke'ish echad b'leiv echad* (as one man and with one heart) moment of the Purim experience. Accepting the Torah, in both generations, required a platform of unity.

We are proud to present a special edition of the *Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To Go*, featuring *divrei Torah* from faculty and administration members of YU's many partner schools. It is such a beautiful expression of unity for us to bring together writers and teachers of Torah from many different types of institutions, elevating the broader *kabalas Hatorah* of Purim for our community.