

The Intersection of Purim and Pesach
Connecting Geulah to Geulah
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Have you ever walked into a room, seen someone you know-, and asked yourself “What is this person doing here?” You know them from a totally different context and they don’t seem to belong in the current setting. I thought of this analogy in reviewing the Gemara in Chullin 139b¹ when it asks; “Where do we find references to Haman, Esther, and Mordechai in the Torah?” The interesting thing is that the Gemara begins this inquiry with the question “where do we find Moshe in the Torah?” Besides for the fact that we find Moshe mentioned in the Torah more than any other person, why is Moshe being associated with the main characters of the Purim story? This is not a one-time occurrence. We see Moshe pulled into the Purim story in the Gemara in Megillah 13b² “**the lot**” (Esther 3:7). A Sage taught the following baraita: “*Once the lot fell on the month of Adar, he, Haman, greatly rejoiced, for he saw this as a favorable omen for the execution of his plans. He said: The lot has fallen for me in the month that Moses died, which is a time of calamity for the Jewish people.*”

Why is it that we see multiple attempts by Chazal to tie Moshe to the Purim story? I believe it is because of the great potential of mankind demonstrated by both Moshe and Esther and the idea that we are not born perfect but are able to develop and achieve greatness. Perhaps if we take a closer look at the Gemara in Chullin, mentioned earlier, we can get a better understanding of this idea of man achieving greatness and why Moshe has a role to play in the Purim story. The Gemara, when asking where do we find reference to Moshe in the Torah, references verse 6:3 in

¹ משה מן התורה מנין (בראשית ו, ג) בשגם הוא בשר – המן מן התורה מנין (בראשית ג, יא) המן העץ אסתר מן התורה מנין (דברים לא, יח) ואנכי הסתר אסתיר מרדכי מן התורה מנין דכתיב (שמות ל, כג) מר דרור ומתרגמינן מירא דכיא

From where in the Torah is the existence of Moses [*Moshe*] alluded to before his birth? He replied that the verse states: “For that he also [*leshaggam*] is flesh; therefore shall his days be one hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3). The numerical value of *leshaggam* is the same as that of the Hebrew name *Moshe*, and it is known that Moses lived a total of 120 years (see Deuteronomy 34:7).

They also asked Rav Mattana: From where in the Torah can one find an allusion to the hanging of Haman? He replied: The verse states after Adam ate from the tree of knowledge: “Have you eaten of [*hamin*] the tree, about which I commanded you that you should not eat?” (Genesis 3:11). *Hamin* is spelled in the same manner as Haman: *Heh, mem, nun*.

They also asked Rav Mattana: From where in the Torah can one find an allusion to the events involving Esther? He replied to them that the verse states: “Then My anger shall be kindled against them on that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall come upon them; so that they will say in that day: Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us? And I will hide [*haster astir*] My face on that day for all the evil which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned to other gods” (Deuteronomy 31:17–18). They also asked him: From where in the Torah can one find an allusion to the greatness bestowed upon Mordecai? He replied: As it is written with regard to the anointing oil in the Tabernacle: “And you shall also take the chief spices, of flowing myrrh [*mor deror*]” (Exodus 30:23); and we translate *mor deror* into Aramaic as: *Mira dakhya*, which resembles the name Mordecai.

² “הפיל פור הוא הגורל”, תנא: כיון שנפל פור בחודש אדר שמח שמחה גדולה, אמר: נפל לי פור בנרח שמחת בו משה. ולא היה יודע שבשבעה באדר מת, ויבשבעה באדר נולד.

The verse states: “They cast *pur*, that is, the lot” (Esther 3:7). A Sage taught the following *baraita*: Once the lot fell on the month of Adar, he, Haman, greatly rejoiced, for he saw this as a favorable omen for the execution of his plans. He said: The lot has fallen for me in the month that Moses died, which is consequently a time of calamity for the Jewish people.

Genesis.³ How exactly do we see Moshe in this verse?⁴ Rashi explains that the numerical value of בְּשֵׁגָם is the same as משה (Moshe). What does this have to do with Moshe? The general context of the verse is a lead up to the flood. The Torah tells us that there was a mixing of the “Sons of Elokim” with the daughters of Adam.⁵ One of the explanations given to the identity of the “Sons of Elokim” was that they were angels that were sent by Hashem. These angels had questioned the struggles of mankind and posited that they could do a better job. Unfortunately, when they came down into the world, they were unable to master the challenges of the evil inclination and their actions helped lead to the decline of the world. Ultimately, Hashem sent the flood to rectify the world. It is in this context that the hint to Moshe is found. “In the fact that he is of the flesh.” It is Moshe, who is born of flesh and blood, who was able to become an “Ish Elokim, A man of G-d.” Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Moshe was drawn from the water, as if to say, his coming was alluded to at the-time of the flood as suggested by the Gemara. So it is the imperfect man, born of flesh and blood, that is able to resist evil inclination and become a man of G-d and achieve greatness.

If this is the case, what does this have to do with Purim? We know that the Purim story concerns the eternal struggle of Klal Yisroel (Israel) and Amalek. Why does Amalek run counter to the Jewish nation? When we look at the initial attack of Amalek, at the time the Jewish people were leaving Egypt, as recounted in Devarim 25,⁶ we observe certain things that give us insight into the ideological issues that underlie the struggle. Rashi clarifies a number of these issues. The verse states “You shall remember what Amalek did to you on the way, when you went out of Egypt, how he happened upon you on the way.”⁷ Rashi explains that there were three things that

³ וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לֹא-יָלֶדוּן רוּחִי בְּאָדָם לְעֹלָם בְּשֵׁגָם הוּא בְּשָׂר וְהָיָה יָמָיו וְעֵשְׂרִים שָׁנָה:
 And the Lord said, "Let My spirit not quarrel forever concerning man, because he is also flesh, and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years."

⁴ בשגם הוא - בשגם בגימטריא כמו משה וכתוב שם והיו ימיו מאה ועשרים שנה וכך היו ימי חיי משה כלומר עתיד לבא בשגם משה מן הנולדים וכן ימיו:

⁵ Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer Chapter 22

רבי אומר ראו המלאכים שנפלו ממקום קדושתן מן השמי' את בנות קין מהלכות גלויות בשר ערוה ומחללות עיניהן כזונות ותעו אחריהן ויקחו מהן נשים שנאמ' ויראו בני האלהים את בנות האדם וגו'.

Rabbi said: The angels who fell from their holy place in heaven saw the daughters of the generations of Cain walking about naked, with their eyes painted like harlots, and they went astray after them, and took wives from amongst them, as it is said, "And the sons of Elohim saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took (them wives of all that they chose" (Gen. 6:2

זְכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עֲמֹלֵק בְּדַרְךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:
 אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדַרְךְ וַיִּזְנֶב בְּךָ כָּל-הַנְּחֻשְׁלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָרֵף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים:

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt— how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear.

⁷ אשר קרך בדרך. לשון מקרה; דבר אחר — לשון קרי וטמאה שקהנה מטמאן במשפב זכור; ד"א — לשון קר וחם, צננך והקשירך מרתיתמך, שקייו כל האמות וראים להלחם בכם ובא זה והתחיל וקראה מקום לאתרים; משל לאמבטי רותחת שאין כל בריה יכולה לירד בתוכה, בא בן בליעל אהד קפץ וירד לתוכה, אע"פ שנקבה הקרה אותה בפני אחרים

are derived from the word “קרה, *Happened upon*.” Amalek’s attack was an expression of their approach to life. The idea that they “happened upon” us was because they did not see any significance to all the great events that were connected to our being taken out of Egypt. They didn’t see the hand of Hashem. Rather they saw it all as just happenstance. As an extension of this outlook, their view of the world is a place of קרי, of pure randomness. As an outgrowth of this philosophy, there is no need for passion (associated with warmth) but rather things are made to be cool. If there is no Divine presence that connects all things, then what we have is a world of utter randomness. In our initial battle with Amalek the Torah tells us that our success in the battle was based on the hands of Moshe. Exodus 17:11: “וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יֵטֵא יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵר עַמְלֵק:” “Then, whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.”

The Mishna in Rosh Hashana, Chapter 3 Mishna 8⁸ asks the question, “*Did the hands of Moses make war?*” The Mishna explains that it was not the hands of Moshe that fought the battle, but rather Moshe helped the Israelites focus on Hashem. When they recognized that their success was based on Hashem’s assistance, they were able to prevail. It was at this moment of confrontation that we recognized the beginning of the historical struggle between Amalek and Yisroel. Moshe, our leader, succeeded, but could not complete the task to wipe out Amalek. This struggle is something that continues until today and was very much addressed at the time of Purim.

There are certain challenges mankind faces in unrelenting war against evil. One is that evil often has elements of truth within it. In the case of Amalek, the claim that this is a world of randomness, is very much true. On the surface, the world appears to us as random. Hashem made it this way so that we would have the space for free will. Another challenge is to be able to see the hand of G-d within the randomness. Yet another challenge that arises is the meaning of the individual. If we understand Moshe’s lesson that Hashem is running the show, then what is the significance of our involvement? This issue is at the core of the Purim story.

HOW HE MET THEE BY THE WAY — The word קרה is connected in meaning with מקרה “a sudden happening”, i.e., he came against thee by surprise. Another explanation is: it is connected in meaning with the term קרי, nocturnal pollution and uncleanness, because he polluted them by pederasty. Yet another explanation is that it is connected in meaning with the expression קור in the phrase קור וחום “cold and heat” and it means: he made you cold and lukewarm after the boiling heat you had before. For all the nations were afraid to war against you and this one came and began to point out the way to others. A parable! It may be compared to a boiling hot bath into which no living creature could descend. A good-for-nothing came, and sprang down into it; although he scalded himself he made it appear cold to others (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei 9).

⁸ “וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יֵטֵא יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵר עַמְלֵק:” — וכי ידיו של משה עושות מלחמה או שוברות מלחמה? אלא לומר לה: כל זמן שהיו ישראל מסתפלים כלפי מעלה ומשעבדים את לבם לאזניהם שבשמים — היו מתגברים, ואם לאו — היו נופלים. “And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed” (Exodus 17:11). It may be asked: Did the hands of Moses make war when he raised them or break war when he lowered them? Rather, the verse comes to tell you that as long as the Jewish people turned their eyes upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed, but if not, they fell.

We need to remember that our enemies are often more sophisticated than we appreciate. In the case of Haman, he had a very deep understanding of the strengths of the Jewish people. One example of this is that he attacked us as a fragmented people.⁹ Haman also understood that the Jews became disassociated from the Mitzvot (Megillah 13b¹⁰). He understood that when united, the Jewish nation is indestructible. Perhaps this is because when we are united we are completely aligned with Hashem, the perfect unity. Haman, with great intent, set up the פּוּר, lottery. His message was, this is a world of randomness. A world that lacks meaning. What we do doesn't matter. It is on this point that we see the most incredible dialog between Mordechai and Esther. After Mordechai goes into mourning upon hearing about the potential destruction of the Jewish nation, Esther sends a message that he should cease his mourning. Mordechai responds that this is very serious, as the plan emanates from Amalek. Esther then explains that she is not scheduled to see the king for the next month. Mordechai's response to this addresses the Amalek issue. We have the "Hands of Moshe" idea (as seen in the original battle with Amalek), that all that we have is from Hashem. The problem is that this created another issue that needed to be addressed. How does what we do matter if Hashem is orchestrating everything? Mordechai's response to Esther was that the Jews are going to be saved regardless of what you do.¹¹ The issue is, what are you going to do? Even though there is the Divine will that is guiding this world, the need for the individual to act is essential. This was Mordechai's message to Esther. She understood and responded, "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf." We thus learned the essential lesson that Esther, the individual, had to fulfill her potential. (It is not a coincidence that we call the fast and book after Esther, as we are celebrating her becoming her complete self).

Perhaps this lesson was at the core of the reaction of the people after the great miracle of Purim. The Gemara in Shabbos 88a explains¹² that the Jews reaccepted the Torah. What was lacking at Mount Sinai was that they were forced into receiving the Torah. It is explained that what was lacking at Mt Sinai was the willingness of the people to be involved in the oral Torah. The initial

⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמוֹן לְמֶלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ יִשְׁנוּ עִם-אֶחָד מִפְּזָר וּמִפֶּרֶד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכֹל מְדִינֹת מְלְכוּתָהּ וְדַתֵּיהֶם שְׁנוֹת מִכְּלֵעַם וְאֶת-דַּתִּי הִפְלִיךְ אִיגָם עֲשִׂים וְלִמְלֶכֶךְ אִיזְרָשָׁרָה לְהַנִּיחָם:

Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them.

¹⁰ He said to Ahasuerus: Let us destroy them. Ahasuerus said to him: I am afraid of their God, lest He do to me as He did to those who stood against them before me. Haman said to him: They have been asleep [*yashnu*] with respect to the mitzvot, having ceased to observe the mitzvot, and, therefore there is no reason to fear.

¹¹ כִּי אִם-הִתְרַשׁ תִּתְרִישׁ־בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת רַחוּם וְהַצִּלָּה יַעֲמוּד לְיְהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אֲחֵר וְאֶת וּבֵית-אָבִיהֶם תֹּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם-לָעֵת כְּזֹאת תִּגָּעַת לְמַלְכוּת:

On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis.

¹² אָמַר רַבָּא: אַף עַל פִּי כֵן הָדוּר קִבְלוּהָ בֵימֵי אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ, דְּכָתִיב: "קִיְמוּ וְקִבְלוּ הַיְהוּדִים" — קִיְמוּ מֵה שְׁקִיבֻלוּ כְּבָר

Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: "The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them" (Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews ordained what they had already taken upon themselves through coercion at Sinai.

revelation was all from Hashem without human involvement. It was only after the Purim story that we understood the need for us to be involved in the ongoing development of Torah.

On a leap year, when we have two months of Adar, the question is asked, which month of Adar do we celebrate the holiday of Purim. The answer is that we celebrate it in the second Adar so that Purim and Pesach are back to back so that we have a connection between the two redemption stories. Perhaps if we understand the deep connection between “The Hands of Moshe”(Divine Providence) and the Purim story, we can understand the need for the two to be interconnected. Passover is the beginning of the journey, of our quest for Freedom, while Purim emphasizes our continued partnership with Hashem in the development of His creation. As we sit down to our Pesach seder and relive the exodus story, we need to remind ourselves of our special relationship with Hashem who made us His nation on this great night. We also must be reminded that this is just the beginning of the journey. May Hashem bless all of us to be able to fulfill our true potential.