

The Story of Purim (in brief)

The story of Purim took place over 2000 years ago in the land of Persia (present day Iraq). The king of Persia was Achashveirosh and in honor of the 3rd year of his reign, he throws a party lasting for 180 days. The party takes place in the capital Shushan and the whole kingdom, including the Jews are invited. At this party, Achashveirosh gets drunk and orders Vashti, his wife, to show off her beauty in front of all the people. Vashti refuses and on the advice of Haman, Achashveirosh's advisor, he has her killed.

Achashveirosh then holds a beauty pageant to find a new wife, and Esther a Jew is chosen. Mordechai, Esther's uncle and also one of the Jewish leaders, tells her to keep quiet about her heritage. Meanwhile, Haman develops a hatred for the Jewish people and devises a plan to get rid of them. He holds a lottery to see on which day he should destroy them, and the lot falls out on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar. Haman convinces Achashveirosh to sign a decree that gives all the other inhabitants of the kingdom the right to kill the Jews. Mordechai and Esther now realize that it was not just a coincidence that she was chosen to be the new queen. God had put her in that position to help save the Jews. Esther approaches the king, and in the merit of the prayers and repentance of the Jewish people, she is successful. The tables are turned, Haman is hanged and his followers are killed. In celebration of this unexpected victory, the holiday of Purim is established as a means of giving thanks to God for saving the Jews.

The Meaning of Purim

Our Rabbis asked "Where is there a hint to Purim in the torah?" The answer given is from a verse in Deuteronomy "I will hide (Astir) my face from you." (Talmud Chulin 136a) The obvious question to ask is that other than the play on words between Queen "ESTheR" and the word ASTiR what does this verse have to do with Purim?

The answer lies in understanding that there are two different ways in which God can relate to us. The first way is by revealing Himself to us openly thru miracles and wonders. When this occurs there is no doubt over who runs and controls the world. This type of relationship existed during the Exodus from Egypt. Thru open miracles like the 10 plagues and the splitting of the sea, the Jews came to the realization that there was a God who runs and controls the world. There is however a second more subtle way in which God interacts with us. This is thru what we call nature and everyday events. In this type of relationship it is much harder to see God's hand in our lives. Although in reality He is there, our perception is that God is hidden and not really in control.

This is the message of Purim. Purim teaches us that God is always running the show even when he seems hidden. The whole story of Purim took place over 9 long years. To an outsider, all the events that led up to Haman's downfall seem like mere coincidence. How fortunate the Jews were that the queen of the land was herself Jewish. What a coincidence! However, the story of Purim teaches us that these events were not just coincidence. For 8 years the Jews were kept in the dark not seeing the light. It was only in the 9th year that everything became clear. God was there the whole time directing the course of events- not up front but rather behind the scenes. This is why the story of Purim is hinted at in the verse "I will hide my face from you"- precisely because that is the meaning of Purim. Purim teaches us that even during a time of darkness, when it seems God is hidden, He is really there. It might take us years to understand it but eventually we will come to the realization that God runs the show.

Laws of Purim

- 1) Megillah Esther, which documents the story of Purim, is read twice from a scroll -once at night and once during the day. Ideally, one should read the megillah in the presence of a minyan-a quorum of 10 men over the age of 13.
- 2) Mishloach Manot. The miracle of Purim led to a new spirit of unity and friendship among the Jewish people. In commemoration, each person is commanded to give 2 gifts of food to a fellow Jew.
- 3) Matanot Le'evyonim-gifts to the poor. One is obligated to give a gift of money to two poor people. This is also in remembrance of the new spirit of unity that occurred after the miracle.
- 4) Seudat Purim-the holiday meal. In celebration of the holiday, we take part in a festive meal with our family and friends.

Check it out on the web

<http://www.aish.com/holidays/Purim/>
<http://ohr.edu/special/purim/>
<http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov/purim/>
<http://www.ou.org/chagim/purim/>



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