



Ad Chatzi Hamalchut: The Al Aqsa Flood and Purim

Today's Hamans set out to destroy us yet with God's help the entire story turned around, *v'nahapoch hu*. What began with a devastating attack on Israel led to the near collapse of Iran and its proxies, fundamentally changing the power dynamics in the Middle East. G-d's hand is recognized not only in exploding beepers, intercepted missiles, and buses blowing up empty, but - astoundingly - in the many remarkable stories of hostages and their families recognizing and embracing G-d from the bowels of Gaza and the depths of despair. Purim in the making!

The obsessive hatred that the Jewish people have encountered throughout history cannot be explained in geopolitical terms. Our Sages (Shabbat 89b) sourced that hatred in the world's reaction to the special relationship G-d established with the Jews at *Sinai*, causing *sinah* (hatred) to descend upon the nations of the world. Antisemitism is rooted in our chosenness and seeks to destroy our unique connection to the divine. Even the current war against the Jews - similar to the Hebron and Jerusalem pogroms of 1929 - is characterized by its perpetrators as the Al Aqsa Flood, a reaction to the perceived Jewish return to the *Mikdash*. Ramban in his introduction to our parsha (Terumah) described the *Mishkan/Mikdash* as a continuation of *Sinai*. That is why

any restoration of the Jewish connection to the *Mikdash* reawakens the *sinah* (hatred) of *Sinai*.

This same phenomenon is the subtext of the Purim story, occurring as it did in the period between the two Temples. This story of antisemitism was driven by the desire to keep the already exiled Jewish people away from their G-d, as the narrative begins with Achashverosh throwing a party celebrating the dashing of our dream to return to *Yerushalayim* (see Megillah 11b), and continues with his constant refrain limiting Esther's requests to "half the kingdom," which the Talmud (Megillah 15b) sees as drawing a firm line against allowing her to restart the rebuilding of the *Mikdash*. Yet despite Haman's and Achashverosh's best efforts, the Purim story led to the *kiymu v'kiblu* recommitment of Klal Yisrael to *Sinai* (Shabbat 88a) and to the resumption of the rebuilding of the *Mikdash* under the leadership of King Darius, son of Esther. The nations despise us for our stubborn connection to G-d, but every effort they make to disrupt that connection is doomed to failure, even if we must find our way back using a different path.

Just as we saw Hashem "face-to-face" at *Sinai* (Devarim 5:4), a visit to the *Beit Hamikdash* is described by the Torah (Shemot 23:17) as going to see the face of G-d, and it is only in

the *Mikdash* that Hashem's full name is said. During the period of the Purim story when we could not go to the *Mikdash* to see His face or hear His name, His miracles remained hidden and His name left unmentioned in the Megillah, but that did not mean that He was not there. On Purim we discovered that G-d remained with us but unseen, acting behind the scenes with hidden miracles, *neis nistar*. The Talmud (Chullin 139b) underscores this by connecting the name Esther to G-d's pledge (Devarim 31:18) to render Himself invisible by hiding His face from us during difficult times, *v'anochi hasteir astir* (spelled as Esther) *panai bayom hahu*. This feeds Haman's ultimate frustration, as he comes to the realization that even without our being able to see G-d's face in His *Mikdash*, we nevertheless remained connected to Him.

That is the true story of Purim, "hide and go seek". G-d may hide His face, but we will search for Him and find Him. The Jewish relationship with G-d is uninterrupted such that when He chooses to go into hiding, we undertake to bring Him out in the open, noticing and acknowledging Him in the hiddenness. That is why as we enter Adar and the Purim season of Divine hiddenness, we read the sections of the Torah instructing us to build the *Mikdash*, to establish His home and visible presence within us where we will be able – so to speak – to again see His face.

During these difficult days, Hashem continues to send us so many signs of His presence, of the durability of that connection. He seems to be inviting us to help Him emerge from hiding. Let's respond to that and not keep His kindness a secret. "Shiru lo zamru lo sichu b'chol nifl'otav. Sing to Him, make music to Him, tell of all His miracles." (Tehillim 105:2) ■

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