

Esther, Chapter Six

– מגילת אסתר, פרק ו –

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ESTHER, YOSEF, AND THE FIRST GULF WAR

Both the language and the storyline of Megillat Esther are rich in parallels to the story of Yosef in Egypt. What are these parallels? And what is the message of these many connections?

First, Yosef and Esther are both children of Rachel Imeinu, as Mordechai, Esther's cousin, is described as an *ish yemini* – from the *shevet* of Binyamin. They are both described as beautiful: *yefeh/yefat toar*. Both are a Jew in disguise – Yosef's brothers think he is an Egyptian viceroy, and Esther hides her Jewish identity from the royal court. In both cases, we find an inconsolable mourner – Ya'akov tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, and refuses to be comforted by his children over the loss of Yosef; Mordechai too tears his clothing and puts on sackcloth when he hears of Haman's evil decree, and he refuses to accept Esther's offer of a change of clothing.

Both Yosef and Esther are where they are for a reason – Yosef tells his brothers that G-d planned his descent to Egypt so that he could save everyone from famine, and Mordechai says to Esther: who knows, perhaps this (to save the Jews) is why you have become queen? When Ya'akov sends Binyamin down to Egypt to the ruler who asked to see him, he says to his son *כְּאֲשֶׁר שָׁכַלְתִּי שְׁכַלְתִּי* – and if I am bereft, so be it. Clearly parallel language describes Esther's attitude to going to the king when she has not been called: *וְכִאֲשֶׁר אֶבְדְּתִי* – and if I am destroyed/killed, so be it. She also uses the words, *אֵיכָבֵד*

אֵיכָבֵד – how can I stand by and see the evil that will befall my nation – the same words that Yehuda uses when begging the ruler to let Binyamin go home: *אֵיךְ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל אָבִי* – how can I go back to my father, and the boy is not with me, lest I see the evil that will befall my father?

What is the point of all of these similarities? What message did Esther and Mordechai intend to send by using language that clearly compares their story to that of Yosef in *Mitzrayim*?

The story of Yosef is the story of a Jew in *galut*, exiled from his homeland. The Torah makes it abundantly clear that G-d is with Yosef every step of the way – we read that Potiphar saw that G-d blessed his house because of Yosef, that G-d was clearly with Yosef in jail – the name of G-d appears again and again throughout the story. The Megillah, on the other hand, is written without even one mention of the name of G-d, to symbolize that G-d is hidden from us. Mordechai and Esther intentionally evoke the Yosef story to teach us that even though we are in *galut*, and even when we cannot see G-d, He is with us, and, even more importantly, G-d will redeem us, as the Jews ultimately left Egypt to enter the Promised Land.

This idea reminds me of my experience when I was in Israel for the year at Ohr Torah Stone's Midreshet Lindenbaum during the first Gulf War, in 1991. I remember how scared everyone in Israel was, as Saddam Hussein attacked

Israel with Scud missiles, the air raid sirens that blared and the gas masks we wore. I remember how amazed we were that G-d protected us from terrible casualties in those attacks. And then the war ended on Purim, and it was clear to us all that it was *Yad Hashem*, that the leader of Persia (Iraq) was once again attacking us, and G-d saved us on Purim, just as He did in the time of the Megillah. Then it occurred to me that when the history books write about the Gulf War, they will not talk about G-d. They'll talk about the date it began, the date it ended, the strategy Saddam employed in trying to bring Israel into the war. The story in the history books would actually read... just like the Megillah, with no mention of G-d. This is the message of Megillat Esther: That it is our job to see the Hand of G-d in history, and furthermore, to sense the presence of G-d in our very own lives.

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