

Rabbi Moshe Berliner



Purim and Marriage

Chazal chose to call this holiday Purim. Why? To gain insight into this choice, it is helpful to juxtapose the name “Purim” with the name of the central *mitzvah* of the holiday, the reading of the Megillah.

Purim is named for the פּוּר, the lottery Haman used to establish the day for the destruction of the Jewish people. What does choice by lottery represent? Pure chance, capriciousness, unpredictability, a world without purpose. It bespeaks a life without ultimate meaning or future goals, a world in which things simply happen. In the world of פּוּר there are recognizable causes and consequences, patterns and structures. It is not a nonsensical world. Haman does want to destroy the Jewish people. He takes terrifying steps to do so. He knows what he is doing and plans carefully. But the ultimate capriciousness of it all is revealed by the way he chooses the date. He simply throws a פּוּר, a lottery. The plan is nefarious but the underlying meaning is exposed by the absurd way he chooses the time of the attack.

This idea stands in sharp contrast with a second central concept of Purim – the reading of the Megillah. The word מְגִלָּה is derived from the word לְגַלוֹת, to reveal, to bring to light, to make known. It signifies an understanding which brings to light the underlying principles, the deeper meaning of the things we experience in our lives. When we read the Purim story in the Megillah, the cursory external experience of life represented by the פּוּר is revealed to be an illusion. Megillat Esther proclaims that all the events of the world are in fact an expression of G-d’s guiding Hand.

What is G-d’s purpose in creating a world in which His hidden Hand directs the force of history? He wanted a דִּירָה בְּתַהוֹמוֹתָיִם, a dwelling place in His creation. He wanted a world in which His presence might not be recognized by the naked eye but could be revealed when one understands His guiding presence. What is the essence of that presence? What is it He desires for us to do when recognizing His hand as the essence of life? He wants us to live in this world in a way that expresses His *middot*. He wants the world, in all its darkness, to be illuminated by man who recognizes G-d’s Kingship and acts in a loving, caring, G-d-like way.

That is the underlying message of the Megillah. In the face of the ostensible rule of the פּוּר, the seeming lack of purpose to history, replete with evil and corruption, there is in fact a guiding hand whose ways and ultimate purpose are commands for us to build our lives reflecting His *middot* of love, concern and care.

The message of the Megillah is relevant to all aspects of our lives. It is perhaps most relevant to our marriages. In our closest relationship, we can choose to live on a superficial level, allowing the day-to-day circumstances of our lives to dictate its meaning, flowing and reacting to whatever we meet along the way. Or we can view our marriages as an opportunity to connect with the deeper values which bespeak the guiding hand of G-d. We can view marriage as an opportunity to live in congruence with the spiritual underpinning which reflects G-d’s values of caring, loving and giving.

We can understand that everything in life, including our marriages, has ups

and downs, times of joy and times of stress, times when G-d’s compassion is hidden. In every situation, we can choose to act and react either out of immediate response, without thought to the consequences, or we can consider our actions and respond by connecting to the values which reflect the deepest desire of G-d, i.e., that our lives, the lives of our marriages and our families, reflect His values of love, respect, compassion and caring.

Chazal call this holiday Purim to express our immediate, often inchoate experience of everyday life. We are bidden to read the Megillah both at night, to symbolize the periods when darkness prevails, and again in the day, symbolizing the times when light prevails, revealing the truths of G-d’s guiding hand. We read the Megillah twice to emphasize our resolve that in all situations we strive to live our lives embracing the revealed truth of G-d’s beneficence.

Purim Sameach!

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