



## A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Alexander Jefferson



Purim in the Holy Land, amidst a year learning and living in the Old City, is truly an experience like none other. The Rabbis have taught us that the more you prepare for a holiday, the more meaningful it becomes. Thus, we spent the weeks leading up to the big day learning about the holiday and the nuances of the story and the mitzvot we are commanded to perform.

My favorite shiur was one taught by Rav Aaron about the underlying theme of Purim. The Gemara teaches that when Mashiach comes, in the event we no longer celebrate holidays, Purim will remain. How does that make sense? Why do we say to increase in happiness upon the arrival of the month of Adar, which contains Purim, not the month of Nisan, which contains Pesach? And most shockingly, we regard the Yom Kippur, also known as Yom Kippurim, as the holiest day of our year as we are judged on that day; yet do we ever stop and notice the detail of its name? Why is the day we deem the holiest of the year only called a day *like* Purim, Yom *Ki*Purim?

Purim represents an all-powerful side of Hashem that we too often don't recognize or are unable to comprehend. In the Pesach story, Hashem overpowers the Egyptians in setting us free. The might of Hashem simply overpowers the might of the greatest army in the world of the time. However, this divide between man and Hashem is not the way we should actually see things. Man is an aspect of Hashem, a ray of G-dliness. At Orayta, we have spent the year breaking down the paradigm that Hashem is an old man in the sky with a great white beard judging us down here. In actuality, we are an aspect of Hashem here in the world. This concept is such a difficult one to comprehend as our dualistic thinking minds so often erroneously put things in boxes. With the aforementioned incorrect perception of Hashem, it makes sense to be grateful that Hashem was able to overpower the decisions and actions of the wicked Egyptians. Purim, however, is a time to get beyond our dualistic thinking.

The famous question mark about the Megilla is in the lack of mention of Hashem's name. The goal of Purim is to look closer and realize that his name *is* there – in the action of every human being. One of the hardest things to comprehend in Judaism is the balance of free choice and determinism. Purim

is about the balance of the two. Hashem does not need to overpower human action and decision; his chosen outcomes can and will come through via the choices we make. We have the free choice to make any decision we want, and, in the end, Hashem's plan will still be executed. Haman's goal was to destroy the Jewish people at a time when we had recently been exiled after the destruction of the First Beit HaMikdash, the First Temple, and were on the brink of total assimilation in Persia. Yet, in reality, it was precisely his threat to our very existence that forced us to band together, avoid assimilation, and rebuild the Second Beit HaMikdash. Purim is such an important and meaningful reality because it allows us to go beyond the human dualistic thinking that Hashem needs to come in and counteract the decisions of humans. In reality, we are of Hashem, and our decisions, no matter what they are, will lead to what is meant to be.

Last, why the different mitzvot of Purim? Why are Jews commanded to drink a rather large amount of, lets just say, *caffeinated drinks* on Purim? Why do we give gifts to the poor and our friends? As Rav Aaron so finely put it, on all other parts of the year, when people get, again for conversational purposes, extremely *hyper*, things begin to blur. If you are to hold up three of four fingers to a *hyper* person, they may reply they see anywhere from two to ten fingers. Yet on Purim, no matter how many fingers you hold up, they will only see one. Purim is about breaking down our dualistic minds and realizing the unity of everything. We are not on Earth apart from the bearded G-d in the sky; our actions and decisions are not ones that Hashem needs his greater might to overpower; and we are not independent from the friend we may have conflict with or from the beggar on the street. We are all unified in our existence as rays of Hashem's endless light and members of the Nation of Israel.

With the lessons from this particular shiur and the many others of the past couple weeks, my friends and I tackled Purim head on with every intention of celebrating our surviving Haman's evil decree to have us killed as well as our unity with Hashem and the people of the world.

The tremendous two-day celebration began Monday night with a party in the Beit Midrash. (Two-day celebration you ask? Isn't Purim only one day? The reward of living in Eretz Yisrael, in terms of days of observance of Holidays, is two fold. Not only do Israelis get to pass on second days of chag and a second rather anti-climactic seder, but they also get two days of the particularly amazing holiday of Purim. Day One is for those who live anywhere in the world in a non-walled city, and Day Two, Shushan Purim, is for those residing in a walled city like Jerusalem. I know, I know, again you have a question. But how can one reside in two places? Well, one not need live where they celebrate Purim; they only need to be present.

In conclusion, Israelis and those in Israel get two days of Purim – one in an ordinary city and one in Jerusalem.) Granted we were still in the Old City; yet, we felt that we should at least commemorate the holiday on the day the rest of the world celebrates. Now, this party was no ordinary Party. There were no Rabbis or Madrichim, dorm counselors, present in neither the planning nor the party itself. The group of guys gathered in the Beis with hamentashen, sunflower seeds, crackers and herring, and plenty of *caffeinated drinks*. Each boy prepared a short word of Torah about Purim, and we sang with each other deep into the night. Then, on Tuesday, the day of Purim, many boys went around Israel to friends or family outside of Jerusalem to partake in Seudas, festive meals.

Our Purim, Shushan Purim, began Tuesday night as we all gathered in the Beit Midrash for a pair of shiurim and Megilla reading. We each arrived fully adorned in costume from pirates to punks to Clark Kent to a grandmother. We heard Megilla and then returned to the dorms for an Orayta Purim Party. Dinner was filled with delicious meat, plenty of *soda*, and songs and skits poking fun at each other. Many guys then went around Jerusalem to celebrate with friends from around the city. Any street you went down in the big parts of the city, song and dance filled the air.

Wednesday began with a student run Orayta minyan, and our very own David Eisenstein's flawless reading of the Megilla. We were then given a couple hours of time off. Many used this time to fulfill the mitzvot of Mishloach Manot and Matanot Le'Evyonim, gifts to our friends and to the poor. A few of us went around town and had some unbelievable fun. It seemed as if the whole country was in costume and making something of this holiday. People were singing in the streets, handing out candies and *sips of soda* to each other, and simply being proud to be Jewish and alive. A few of us filled our pockets with small bills and chocolates and handed them out to the best-dressed youngsters and as many poor people as we came across. We walked through a carnival and just soaked in the joyous atmosphere.

The whole school then met together for Mincha and our Seudah. Thanks to a couple of the guys, we had a delicious barbeque of burgers, hot dogs, and chicken wings. This meal was a high point of the year thus far as we all sang and danced together in huge amounts the more *hyper* we each got. The Rabbis did a short skit followed by more songs poking good natured fun at one another. The meal went on for hours with a seemingly endless supply of snacks, words of Torah, songs, and laughs. After the Seudah, many of the guys went separate ways either to other Seudahs or more joyous times hanging out with friends around the city. Purim ebbed away to the sounds of thousands of people rushing to the Old City for a taste of the chag in the center of it all.

A particular highlight of Purim for me came when almost a hundred people joined in song in the middle of Ben Yehudah Street and sang 'Am Yisrael Chai' – 'The Nation of Israel is Alive'. I remember being amidst this group and thinking to myself back on the shiur Rav Aaron had given. If only Haman could see us now. Not only did he fail to destroy us, but we now have a country of our own. I have come with thousands of young adults to live and study in Israel for the year. I spent two days celebrating how the Jewish people are flourishing in our homeland – a land that is temporarily and permanently my home. The days were filled with people giving gifts to one another everywhere I looked. Swaying in song, I looked to my left and to my right, and there were so many others, who differences aside, danced as unified aspects of Hashem. In my most *hyper* state, we were all one. The Nation of Israel is Alive. Take that Haman.

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*Alexander grew up in Houston, Texas and attended Bellaire High School there. He was the President of the Theater Club and directed the Senior Play "Miss Witherspoon". He was the Sports Editor of "The Three Penny Press"; the school newspaper. Alexander was also the Mazkir Galil of the Texas Bnei Akiva Chapter. He is planning on attending the University of Pennsylvania after Orayta.*

*His favorite part of Orayta is: "The Philosophy that's taught at Orayta encourages us to be inquisitive about everything and to find meaning behind your actions. And that we're taught to develop a relationship with God beyond what we were taught in Day School."*