

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Last Laugh

When Sir Donald Wolf- it, the last of the great English actor managers was lying on his deathbed, one of his young actors said to him, "Sir Donald, after life so filled with success and fame, dying must be hard." To which the Donald replied, "Dying is easy; comedy is hard."

They say a coward dies many times. The same must also be true for comedians. Any actor who stood in front of an audience and watched the line that he's practiced for weeks clang helplessly to the floor to roars of silence will appreciate Sir Donald sentiment. Comedy is hard because we don't really understand what makes people laugh. We know what's funny because we laugh at it. But trying to distill the essence of comedy into a set of principles, that's not so easy.

One of the basic elements of comedy is incongruity. A bank manager wearing a clown's red nose is funny. A clown wearing a red nose is not. Underlying incongruity is a deeper idea of absurdity. We expect the world to have a certain natural order of events, and when these events are suddenly turned upside down, the result is comic.

One of the most notable aspects of the Purim story is hipuch, sudden reversal. Haman has his gallows ready to hang Mordechai. The letters decreeing the final solution of

the Jewish people have been sent out in all 127 languages to the far corners of the Persian Empire. Yet in a split second, everything turned upside down. The only difference between tragedy and comedy is the ending.

Jews have always been known for their humor. It's as though the world recognizes that there's something particularly Jewish about humor, and that humor is part of the essence of being a Jew. But behind every Jewish joke, there's a Jewish tear, a wry, bittersweet feeling of 2000 years of exile, tears of sadness, tears of hope.

In the song of Shir Ha'maalot we sing after a festive meal, there's a line that yearns for the coming of Mashiach. It says, "Then will our mouths be filled with laughter." The coming of Mashiach is compared to a birth. The tragedies of our era, of our people, are his birth pangs. In birth, great pains suddenly and instantly turn to enormous joy. And similarly, when the Mashiach comes, all the pain of the Jewish people will be reversed to joy in an instant. And just as in the Purim story, it will come in crisis, in catastrophic reversal, in hippuch.. He will come in the darkest hour just before the dawn. And only then our mouths will be filled with laughter. A laughter of discovery. A laughter of total realization. And then we'll see how all the pieces in this comedy of the absurd that we call life, they all fit into place. Then we will laugh the last laugh.

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In the Palace

The world may be fascinated with the Royals from across the ocean, but we, the Jewish nation, have our own Royals to learn from and emulate. We look up to Queen Esther who clothed herself splendidly. “Vatilbash Esther malchus, Esther donned royalty.” (Megillas Esther 5:1)

While Megillas Esther is translated as the Scroll of Esther, it can also be understood as l’galos hester, to reveal the hidden, alluding to the fact that HaShem’s name doesn’t appear in the Megillah.

The miracle of Purim was hidden. The Megillah is not only a book of hidden miracles, but also a book of hidden messages within its verses.

“Vatilokach Esther, Esther was taken” to the palace of Achashverosh. (ibid 2:16) The Megillah emphasizes that Esther did not choose to go to the palace, but that she was “taken”. Imagine Esther, a young orphaned girl, alone in the palace of an enemy of the Jewish people. There, during those dark, difficult days, Esther was not only a survivor, but a fighter, speaking up for the existence of her people.

What was Esther’s secret, from where did she get her power? While she clothed herself royally, it wasn’t the silk, satin or velvet that gave Esther strength, but the spiritual armor she enveloped herself with.

In Hebrew, the last three letters of Esther’s name are samach, suf, reish, spelling the word sayser, meaning “hidden”. “Esther had not revealed her background or

her people.” (ibid 2:10) Mordechai had instructed Esther to keep her true identity under wraps, hidden from Achashverosh. He understood that her becoming queen was no coincidence, but part of HaShem’s plan. Mordechai reasoned that if she revealed her background too soon, she might lose the opportunity for which she was planted in the palace. His advice to Esther was to let the story play out, waiting to reveal herself at the proper time.

Esther’s name begins with an aleph. Aleph for Echad, the One and Only HaShem. Aleph for emunah, strong belief and faith. Aleph, for achdus, the unity amongst the Jewish people that Esther brought about. Aleph for avos, the z’chus avos, the merit of her ancestors that were with her.

Esther’s royal clothes were a beautiful tapestry of turning to the Echod, the One Above with tefillah. It was interwoven with strong emunah, faith, belief and trust in HaShem. Esther turned to Mordechai instructing him “Leich k’nos es kol haYehudim, Go and gather all the Jews” before approaching the king. (ibid 4:16) Threads of achdus, tying it all together. And finally, Esther drew upon her avos, the strength of her father, as Esther was bas Avichayil, Avi, my father, chayil my strength.

Was Esther afraid? Of course she was. But she was able to rise above her fears and worries by clothing herself royally. By adorning herself with the “aleph”, as she presented her plea before Achashverosh. She truly felt that HaShem was walking with her. Her royal, spiritual garments empowered her to become a

true malkah, a queen of Am Yisroel, the heroine of her people.

HaShem brought about hatzalah, salvation to the Jewish people through a young orphaned girl. A message for all future generations. A message for us all – one should ever feel alone and abandoned, like an orphan, because HaShem is always with us. (Midrash Esther Rabbah 6:7).

Esther requested that her story be recorded for future generations, enabling all of us to learn from her experiences. Each of us has a life mission. Not necessarily in a palace, but in our homes, our schools, our work environment, our communities. It’s up to us to fulfill our task and know that HaShem assigns each person a life mission that he or she is capable of fulfilling.

The Jewish people in Persia merited to experience a miracle. A ve’nehapach, a total turn-around from a day that was marked for pain and tragedy to a day of joy and celebration. When the miracle came, it came quickly, as we see in the words of the Megillah: “Then the king commanded, tell Haman to hurry and fulfill Esther’s wish.” (Megillas Esther 5:5) The king said further to Haman, “Hurry, get the clothes and the horse as you have spoken, and do so to Mordechai the Jew.” (ibid 6:10)

My mother a”h shared a haunting Holocaust memory in her book, Life Is a Test:

“My brothers and I agreed that the one word that

stands out most in our minds from our Holocaust experiences was “Schnell.” The Nazis were constantly yelling, “Schnell! Schnell! — Quickly! Quickly!”

We had to leave our homes quickly.
We had to climb into the cattle cars quickly.

We had to march from the railroad station to Bergen-Belsen quickly.

We had to ready ourselves for roll call every morning quickly.

And they stuffed and shoved millions of our people into the gas chambers — quickly.

Oy Tatte Zeese, if it was so urgent for those evil ones to quickly bring about our demise, then surely, Almighty G-d, our Tatte Zeese, it should be even more urgent for You

to bring us, Schnell! Schnell! — Quickly! Quickly! — our redemption speedily in our own day.

We, Your children, are very tired — two thousand years is a very long time.”

Purim is truly an auspicious day to daven for the ultimate redemption. There is a well-known mandate that on Purim, “kol haposhet yad nosnim lo, anyone who stretches out their hand is given!” Whomever requests tzedakah is given – no questions asked. It’s time for us to utilize the eis ratzon of Purim, to open “our” hands and be-

sech HaShem for our needs, for refuos, healing, for yeshuos, salvation, for an end to the terrible tragedies that are befalling our people in Eretz Yisroel and around the world. It’s time to ask for the geulah b’korov, for the redemption to come quickly.

Rabbi Tzvi Sytner

Small Miracles

There is no such thing as a small miracle. A miracle is a miracle, period. Indiscriminate of its magnitude, if something happened beyond the realm of the ordinary, extended above the sphere of the expected, it is miraculous.

Who’s to say that you should have woken up today able to see with your eyes, hear with your ears or walk with your feet? No one. If you are, G-d handed you a present. He handed you a miracle. Is it the size of the Splitting of Sea? You might say that it isn’t. But think of it differently. A miracle is a miracle, no matter the shape or size.

If you have a family, a job or a home, it’s not because that’s how life is meant to be. You could have exactly the opposite – no family, no job and no home, and just the same, it can be said, “That’s how life is meant to be.” It’s not nature that’s organically running your life. It’s a symphony of people and places being set up for you, an orchestrated harmony of parts and pieces being designed for you. By G-d to you and for you.

That’s what we call a miracle.

Human tendency is to notice the outliers, to be in awe of the colorful supernatural. But that tendency is born out of desensitization to what we see any day, every day. And we do see people breathing, walking and

talking every day. That daily scene grows on us and dulls our sensitivity to the ordinary.

But that doesn’t take away from the miracle that we call life.

Big or small, it’s the same G-d, giving you the same result – a miracle, a blessing. It’s His love, and it knows no bounds.

That’s all there is to it. A bona fide miracle.

Rabbi Menachem Nissel

Small Moments

Thank you for reading this edition of The TorahAnyTimes Newsletter. If you’ve enjoyed, please let us know – we’d love to hear from you! Email info@torahanytime.com.

I will never forget the time I drove Rav Moshe Aharon Stern zt"l. The impression it made me resonates to this day.

Before Rav Moshe Aharon made his way inside, he told me to stay in the car and wait for him. It will only take ten minutes, he told me. I was fine with that, and so I settled into my seat and began to wait.

Now, where I was parked, there was a parking meter, where I needed to put in twenty-five cents. My thinking was that if I would see a parking enforcement officer come my way, I'd get out of the car and drop change in the meter. But otherwise, it's just a quarter and I'm in the car anyway.

True to his word, ten minutes later, out walked Rav Moshe

Aharon. So smoothly, and drawing so little attention to his movements, he took out twenty-five cents and dropped it into the meter.

It was a small moment of greatness, which spoke volumes about him. But this is the nature of gedolim, of those who are truly great. Gedolim become who they are through the small things they do.

In this day and age, we are mesmerized by those who are charismatic and brilliant. But you can be that way, and they are gifts from Hashem. You can love to learn and thus know a ton of information, and you can know how to give advice to others and seen much success. But all of this doesn't translate into Torah greatness until the way you talk to your gardener and the way you are when

no one is looking is taken into consideration.

Small moments are the defining moments of true greatness. If you can do small things with greatness, then you are indeed truly a great person.

You are big because you focus on what is small.

Rabbi Yossi Bensoussan

Rise Above

The trick of the yetzer hara is not to make you do something wrong. You are going to make mistakes and sin. You are a human being. You will falter and fail, and you have to. It has to happen because you are imperfect, or otherwise you can never grow and improve. You can't stand at the top of giants and build yourself into greatness unless you fail. G-d designed you with impulses

and drives, and knows that you will struggle with yourself and not come out on top each time.

The yetzer hara has a different objective.

His trick is to keep you down. He succeeds when you label yourself and are hounded by shameful thoughts and feelings. He wants you to stay down and define yourself by that failure, so he induces you into depression and despondency. He makes you start going down a path

that is committed to reinforcing and sabotaging yourself into thinking you are a bad person.

But that's all the sly work of the yetzer hara.

Rise above it. You can. And you will.

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