

## **The True Reality**

**Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

Face it. Life has its rough patches, days when nothing seems to go as planned and everything you do leaves you feeling frustrated.

It's a nice, sunny Sunday, just a few days before Purim, and you remember that you need to get shoes for your children for Pesach. So, you gather them up and head to the shoe store. As you approach the door, you realize that you weren't the only one who had the idea to go to the store today. You end up spending a couple of hours there, waiting in line, trying on shoes, paying, and hoping that they will still fit and be intact when Pesach arrives. Then, you shove your kvetchy cutie-pies into the car for the ride home, which should take ten minutes but, of course, takes half an hour.

There are days when your blood test results come back from the doctor and your sugar levels are high. He calls to remind you for the umpteenth time that you really need to start exercising. There are days when your boss is upset at you, when a deal you've been working on falls through, when interest rates stay high and you can't make your payments, when your chavrusa doesn't show up, or when the teacher gives a surprise test and you're not the only one who fails.

Yes, life can be complicated and challenging. The biggest challenge—and the key to success—is staying calm, not allowing yourself to be affected by the negativity or things going wrong, and reminding yourself to be happy and grateful for what you have and for the good times.

More than that, to maintain our sanity and equilibrium, we need to remember that everything that happens is overseen and directed by Hashem. He created each one of us for a purpose, and we each have a mission to fulfill in Hashem's world. When we are tested—whether it's by small things, like traffic or long lines at the shoe store, or by matters of much greater consequence—we must understand that the challenges we face are meant to improve us. We are meant to rise above them without becoming depressed or losing ourselves.

Each person is unique and special, and together we form the beautiful mosaic that is Klal Yisroel when we are united and filled with simcha.

The posuk in Devorim chastises and curses those who do not serve Hashem with joy. This may be because people with true belief and faith in Hashem are not easily broken. Even when things seem to be going wrong, they are able to smile because they understand that their situation is part of a Divine plan devised by the Av Harachamon, who seeks only the best for them.

Purim is a day of immense joy because it reminds us not to judge anything by outward appearances. We are taught not to rush to judgment and to recognize that things that appear bad and awful may actually be good.

As the story of Purim unfolded over the course of nine years, things that seemed good were actually bad and things that seemed bad were actually good.

Achashveirosh threw a party, and everyone attended, enjoying themselves. They thought that the party was a good thing, but, in reality, it was bad, because their enjoyment provoked the wrath of Hashem and led to the evil decree.

At the king's feast, the queen refused him and he had her executed. While that was seen as a terrible thing at the time, it was ultimately for the good, because she was replaced by Esther. The Jews feared that Esther becoming queen was bad, worrying for her safety in the hands of the despot. But in truth, it was for the good, as she would later be able to intervene and save the Jews from destruction.

Esther's uncle, Mordechai, made a point of snubbing the king's chief deputy. The people were upset with him for provoking the evil man into declaring a day for the wanton murder of the Jews, but, in fact, it was the merit of Mordechai's refusal that led to the Jews' salvation and the unification of the people.

The Megillah introduces Mordechai by referring to him as an "ish Yehudi, a Jewish man," which Chazal teach us to read as "ish yechidi, an individual man." Mordechai was a great talmid chochom, and part of his greatness was that he viewed himself as an individual who thought for himself and followed Hashem according to what he knew was right. He wasn't swayed by popular opinion, didn't conform just because others did, and stood out as someone who knew that his mission in this world was to follow Hashem's path and inspire others to do the same.

While artists often portray Mordechai as a serious and somber figure, I imagine him with a long, flowing beard and a constant smile. For even as the events of Purim were unfolding, he knew that they were part of a plan orchestrated by Hashem and that it would have a positive ending. He understood that everything Hashem does is for the good, and thus he remained in a state of simcha and tuv leivav despite the chaos around him.

We must learn from Mordechai and recognize that in a world that often promotes conformity and sameness, being a yechidi, an individual, is not only vital for our personal growth as Jews, but also serves a deeper moral purpose. While it can be tempting to blend in and follow the crowd, choosing to embrace our uniqueness as children of Hashem and descendants of holy ancestors carries profound significance.

Part of Amaleik's mission was to destroy the Jewish sense of standing apart as bnei melochim, the children of kings. At Krias Yam Suf, Hashem showed His love for us, forming us into His nation by freeing us from Mitzrayim and enabling us to escape its grasp. All the nations of the world were awed by what had happened. But Amaleik decided to attack the Jewish people, seeking to convince them that they were no different than the other nations.

Amaleik wanted to erase the Jews' sense of being special, believing that there was nothing unique about them. Throughout history, despite Amaleik's hatred for us, he and his descendants have given us the choice of either blending in with them or facing destruction. The same happened with Haman, says the Bais Halevi at the end of his peirush on Chumash. The Megillah (7:4) quotes Esther Hamalkah as telling Achashveirosh that she and her people had been sold to be killed, using a double expression, "laharog ule'abeid."

The translation of laharog is "to be killed," but le'abeid means "to be lost." The Bais Halevi quotes commentators who explain that the Jews of the time were given a choice: either convert or be killed. Le'abeid, as mentioned, means "to be lost." The intention of Haman and Amaleik was and is to cause the Jewish people to be lost by integrating with their host countries. Amaleik tells us that we are nothing special and that there is no reason for us to maintain our identity: "Come join us. There is nothing unique about you anyway," they say to us. Were we to believe them and forsake our uniqueness, we would become lost among them.

Thus, the challenge to maintain our uniqueness has always been both a communal and personal challenge. We must know that each one of us is special and unique, and also that we are special and unique as a people, regardless of the negative voices that seek to diminish us. To be a Yehudi is to be a yechidi.

This week's parsha of Ki Sisa opens with the mitzvah of counting the Jewish people following the sin of the Eigel. The posuk declares that Jews are not counted in the regular fashion, but rather each person donated a half-shekel coin to the Mishkon and the coins were counted.

A simple explanation for this method of counting is that nobody should feel that they are merely a number. Instead, wherever they are and no matter how many people they are among, each person is an individual with value, symbolized by the coin. Not only does each person have value, but everyone has unique talents and abilities that allow him to be productive and successful in Hashem's world. The rich, the poor, and everyone in between are all equal in Hashem's eyes, each with what he needs to carry out his shlichus in perfecting the world and preparing it for the geulah.

Rav Tzadok Hakohein of Lublin writes (Tzidkas Hatzaddik 154) that just as we are obligated to believe in Hashem, we are also obligated to believe in ourselves. People should never get down on themselves or give up on themselves, feeling that they don't have what it takes to make it in this world. In whatever position a person finds himself, he has to know that Hashem is pulling for him, and if he lifts himself up with renewed faith in himself, Hashem will help him out of the rut.

People who are looking to invest money know that if they put their money into a stock market S&P fund, their money will increase over time. That is true, but it doesn't go up in a straight line. Sometimes it goes up and other times it goes down. It can go up daily for weeks and then crash, and then again begin the uphill climb, and vice versa. But if you believe in the power of the market and keep your money there through the ups and downs and wait it out, you will have handsome earnings.

Life is like the S&P. If you believe in yourself and believe in Hashem and don't quit when you fail or when the world seems to be on the precipice of blowing up, you will succeed and be joyous. If you appreciate your uniqueness and unique abilities, and have proper emunah and bitachon, nothing will deter you from remaining strong and standing up to the yeitzer hora, the voices of the many, and Amaleik.

The message of Purim is that if you are a Yehudi and thus a yechidi, nobody will be able to rip you down and destroy you.

Like a beacon of light on a dark, stormy night, Purim shines into our world, encouraging us. There are gray days, dark days, days that feel like night, days when you want to give up. Purim reminds us that the gray will turn to blue, the dark to light, the night to day, and sadness and gloom to gladness in full bloom.

When Purim comes, our worries are set aside. We are reminded not to be sad or downcast. On Purim, we are reminded that just as our ancestors were delivered from despair over certain doom, so can we be spared of our burdens and watch our afflictions heal if we adopt the proper mindset.

It's Purim. Dance, smile, and be happy. Look at the positive. Be optimistic.

Purim is not an escape from reality. Purim is reality. Purim is a reminder of the reality that empowers the Jewish people with the clarity and awareness to continue on.

Let the spirit of Purim overtake you on Purim and all year round. You'll be happier and more fulfilled.

Ah freilichen Purim. Ah gantz yohr freilich.