



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

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Parashat Tzav – Purim

Do We Even Need Politics?

-Rabbi Meir Maimon-

Most of us are familiar with the story of Megillat Esther, while those of us who are not will find in their first reading of the Megillah that it contains all of the elements of a Hollywood classic: intrigue, a story of salvation that weaves its way through conspiracy and deception, emotional highs and lows, money and most importantly, a happy ending. At the same time, when taking a deeper look, there are many questions that arise in connection with the governmental methodology employed by the Ahasuerus administration. The picture painted by the Megillah is one of a drunken monarch, an inebriate incapable of managing himself and his kingdom who is almost completely at the whim of his advisers and his cabinet. Ahasuerus is depicted as a king without any conviction and independence. He does not cease to consult others with regard to what to do and even after accepting counsel he generally flip flops back and forth and returns to seek multiple additional opinions. This was what happened in the case of Vashti and then again when Ahasuerus was offered bribery by Haman in exchange for his consenting to the extermination of the Jewish population of Persia. Ahasuerus is always led by others and almost never initiates at all.

How, then, can we call the king a leader? Was his tendency to seek counsel from others an expression of wisdom or dependence and incapacity? Our Sages debated this question (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 12) and ultimately left it unresolved. Nevertheless, we will try to list several points that indicate that Ahasuerus was indeed a wise king after all.

Ahasuerus ruled an immense portion of the ancient world, from India (*Hodu*) in Asia till Ethiopia (*Kush*) in Africa, and he therefore needed to stabilize his regime and create a firm governmental authority in each territory. Toward this end he was guided by three foundational principles: (1) freedom of religion: even in the provinces conquered and subsequently ruled by the Persians, Ahasuerus did not force Persian religious principles on the local population, but rather was inclusive of the local deities together with the Persian gods; (2) intelligence: Ahasuerus spread a wide and deep intelligence network throughout the kingdom, which transmitted information swiftly and efficiently to the relevant authorities and allowed the king to prevent political unrest and uprising around the kingdom; and (3) checks and balances: whenever a political force arose anywhere in the kingdom, Ahasuerus made sure to check that party's rise with a counter-political force, thus restoring and maintaining a steady balance of forces throughout the kingdom.

Now that we have established the foregoing criteria, our reading of the Megillah takes on a completely different light. Esther invites Ahasuerus to a luncheon together with Haman, during the course of which she invites both men to another luncheon on the following day. Ahasuerus interprets this action as the setting of the stage for an attempted coup engineered by the queen and the vizier. The king spends a sleepless night tossing and turning in his bed because he cannot



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understand how he did not receive any intelligence regarding the plot he thought was afoot. When reviewing the events of the most recent plot against him, Ahasuerus discovers that instead of repaying Mordechai for his loyalty he promoted Haman to his current high level position. Ahasuerus takes note of that failure and the events of that night represent the turning point in the Megillah.

Haman, on the other hand, is convinced that the king and queen value him to the highest degree. This is also the reason that he arrives at the king's bedchamber in the middle of the night to suggest that the king hang Mordechai. Ahasuerus, who by this point in the story is wary of Haman's intentions, interprets Haman's curious nocturnal visit as an assassination attempt. Ahasuerus also interprets the messages conveyed by Haman differently that Haman himself originally intended: the king should dress the man whom he desires to honor in royal garb, place a crown on his head and give him the royal horse as a public demonstration of thanks. After hearing Haman's message, the king no longer has any doubt as to Haman's intentions of taking the crown for himself. This presents Ahasuerus with the opportunity to counterbalance the suspected insurrection. By bestowing all of the royal symbols and glory on Mordechai, the man most hated by Haman, Ahasuerus can humiliate Haman and restore stability to the kingdom.

The message from the Megillah is thus clear: although on the surface the world operates based on political and economic rules, a deeper look will always reveal the invisible hand directing the events behind the scenes.

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