

PARSHAS KI SISA

תש"פ

We have Purim, Pesach and the coronavirus.

Purim is an incredible story.

After reading the Megillah we recite a piyut which says Hashem upends the plots and schemes of wicked people. Hashem is protecting His Nation. We have an obligation to retell in each generation that our bitachon—and the Rambam adds tefillah and teshuvoh—always save us from danger.

Hashem runs the world in two modes. One mode is Purim. Hashem plays around with the minds of Homon and Achashveirosh to set up a certain chain of events—masterminded and executed by Hashem to achieve a very specific outcome. An outsider observing it would say it was a weird, random collection of events. He wouldn't notice Hashem is intervening to make things happen. But nothing that happens is random. Our bitachon is what tells us that at each step of the way, when the outcome is far from clear, we know that whatever is happening is ultimately being done for our ultimate salvation. This is one way Hashem runs history.

The second mode is Pesach.

Moshe comes to Pharaoh and brings supernatural makkos to punish him and the Egyptians. But the makkos aren't just to punish—they are also to educate. Klal Yisroel were immersed in avodo zoro for generations at that point, and they needed to be taught who Hashem is and the sheker of avodo zoro. The attraction of avodo zoro is that it offers human beings a powerful tool to control their own life—one can deal with the natural forces which run the world and manipulate them by worshipping them to get what you want from them—health, children, prosperity, victory in war, protection from natural disasters, etc.

We have this same mindset today in the modern world through modern science. We feel we are in control of our health and our climate and our prosperity by using the technology we develop to control the natural and economic forces that we mistakenly believe run the world. There is no place for Hashem running the world.

Hashem had to shake Klal Yisroel out of that entire mindset—Hashem is the Supreme Power that is not subject to any other power. It took open miracles to do this—but even that is sometimes not enough—if you are too invested in your control over your life.

When Hashem works behind the scenes like on Purim, you need to have a certain insight to perceive it. You have to see that all these insecure people are being played and manipulated by Hashem. You have a king who was a simpleton married to a daughter of the king and is so insecure that he needs to show everyone how powerful and independent he is. Then you have Homon who is also insecure vis-a-vis his wife Zeresh and he has to convince Achashveirosh to kill Vashti to improve his standing at home. Out of all of this, Esther becomes the queen of the entire Persian empire! Out of all the beautiful women gathered and presented to Achashveirosh, who does he fall in love with? Esther! It's a series of incredible coincidences. Then Mordechai just happens to overhear the conversation of Bigson and Seresh—everything just falls into place.

We celebrate Purim not just because we were saved once from complete annihilation. It is ongoing. We need to be aware that this story of Purim is not unique—Hashem is constantly orchestrating everything that happens to Klal Yisroel throughout Jewish history.

More than that—the Rambam writes that everything that happens in the entire world is being orchestrated for those who are serving Hashem—it all depends on us. That means if there was someone in the Wuhan province of China who ate some *aver min hachai* of some wild, exotic creature and got the coronavirus from it, and then it spread all over the world, somehow it was for some purpose for Klal Yisroel.

Once in history, Hashem revealed Himself and performed open miracles to shake us out of the avodo zoro mindset. It was to teach all future generations the power and the hashgocho of Hashem over the world. We go through the makkos—there was dever—a plague on the Egyptian livestock. You can try to claim it was some virus or bacteria which infected all the animals. But how can you think it killed only the Egyptian animals on the spot simultaneously? There was borod, but it was fire and ice combined—this couldn't be natural hail. There was choshech, but it wasn't just a solar eclipse. It blocked out the sun—the major avodo zoro of the Egyptians—for three days straight and it just so happened that 80% of Klal Yisroel died at this time.

You have to be blind to think any of this was natural.

Then we get to makkas bechoros. Keep in mind that everything Moshe Rabbeinu had predicted, came to pass exactly as he said for nine makkos. Yet we read that when makkas bechoros struck, Pharaoh has to get out of his bed. This is incredible. It means that Pharaoh was able to go to sleep on his bed that night just like any ordinary night, after hearing Moshe warn that all the first born—people and animals—will perish at midnight. He wasn't nervous, he wasn't panicked. We call this “cognitive dissonance”—your mind is in a blur—it just refuses to register things that are too uncomfortable to confront.

It tells us something else—for all the other makkos, Pharaoh didn't wake up in the middle of the night. He didn't pay attention—even though Hashem is making Egypt collapse and crumble makkoh after makkoh. Things couldn't be more clear. But he doesn't pay attention. Most of us don't pay attention because we are also going through life in a daze.

A person who opens his eyes to hashgocho protis realizes that Purim is not a one-time event in our history. It happens all the time. None of us can predict how things will pan out in the end.

Which countries are the most severely affected by the coronavirus? China, Iran, and the Arab world. Not exactly friends of the Jews. Iran constantly threatens Israel with destruction and its population was hit quite severely—even government ministers were stricken. Their economy is in a state of total collapse because their income is largely dependent on oil sales to China. The Chinese stopped production and caused a massive disruption. In Europe, millions of people are staying home and not driving to work. This means oil consumption is at an all-time low globally and the oil prices are in a nose dive.

Economies are collapsing all over the place. Hashem is clearly doing something and we have to take notice. The rule is when Hashem is drastically changing things in the world, it is not a time to panic and learn less Torah. It is a time for cheshbon hanefesh and increasing our zechuyos.

There were two reactions that Klal Yisroel could have had to Mordechai's command to do teshuvoh after Homon's decree was issued. We know that Mordechai discouraged the Jews from joining Achashveirosh's seudoh. But that wasn't so politically wise—it could

have been interpreted as an insult to the king! Everyone knew that Mordechai refused to bow to Haman even though it was the law—and his defiance incited Haman to go after all the Jews to assuage his bruised ego! Now Mordechai is telling us we have to fast and do teshuvah for our aveiros because of Haman's gezeirah? Klal Yisroel could have easily turned around and blamed Mordechai for all their troubles! But they didn't. Although they didn't really understand why they were in such mortal danger, they understood it was time for cheshbon hanefesh. Mordechai tells them they need to do teshuvah and Klal Yisroel takes it very seriously. And they are saved.

Hashem has brought something to the world and it is causing a mass-hysteria. Whether this hysteria is justified or the media is hyping it up for ratings is beside the point. The fact is that people are panicking and economies are collapsing. Hashem is disrupting the entire world for a reason. We don't know what it is. All the world leaders have their egos and their national pride—each one yelling at the next—trying to lay the blame for the virus. Trump likes to take credit for all his pressure tactics against China, and Hashem comes along and just does one little thing and turns the world upside-down.

We have to sit up and pay attention—this is happening for the sake of Klal Yisroel. And we can determine the outcome of this global crisis—based on our reaction to it. We shouldn't take the wrong attitude and

use this as an excuse to slack off or take extra time away from yeshiva. This event should inspire a tremendous hisorerus. Take your learning more seriously, not less. Don't panic about borders being closed.

It reminds me of the Gulf War of 1990 where parents were calling me hysterically about the bombs falling in Yerushalayim. I told them I am sitting here in Yerushalayim and no bombs are falling! They told me, "but the news networks are saying they are falling!" I told them to change the channel. There was a tremendous hisorerus in Eretz Yisroel during that period of time—the learning here in Yeshiva was the most intense it ever was. And not a single scud missile fell here in Yerushalayim.

We have to understand Hashem is running the world—not Trump, not Iran. They all think they are running the world—and Hashem only has to send one little virus to show them who is really in charge.

We don't know what is coming at the end of all this, but Chazal teach us that in times of distress and crisis, it is mechayev us to take our yiddishkeit, our Torah and our tefillah more seriously than before. Then we will grow and be better for it. We should end the zman strongly and begin the next zman in the strongest way. Now is the time to be mechazek ourselves and each other and not let the zman fizzle out. This is not to say we don't take the necessary precautions, but we need to keep our heads and stay focused on what's important.