



**JEWISH FUNDS
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combining The Shefa Fund
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The Possibility of Purim

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א בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת
המלך ויאמר להביא
את ספר הזכרונות דברי
הימים ויהיו נקראים לפני
המלך :

On that night, the king's sleep was disturbed, and he called for his book of remembrances to be brought before him. – Esther, 6:1

א בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת
המלך, נדדו שמים כסאו
של מלך מלכי המלכים
הקב"ה שראה את ישראל
בצרה וכי יש שינה לפני
המקום והלא כבר נאמר
(תהלים קכ"א) הנה לא
ינום ולא ישן שומר
ישראל אלא בזמן
שישראל שרויין בצער
ואו"ה בשלוח לכך נאמר
(שם /תהלים/ מ"ד) עורה
למה תישן ה',

"On that night, the king's sleep was disturbed." The heavens, the throne of the sovereign of sovereigns, the Blessed Holy One, was disturbed, for God saw Israel suffering. But—does God sleep? Isn't it said, "The guardian of Israel neither rests nor sleeps" (Psalms 121) Yes—when Israel is suffering and the rest of the nations are at peace [God sleeps]. For this reason, it says "Awake, why do you sleep, God?" (Psalms 44)

-- Midrash Esther Rabbah 10:1

אמר המן לאחשורוש אלהיהם של אלו שונא זמה העמד להם זונות ועשה להם משתה וגזר עליהם שיבואו כולם ויאכלו וישתו ויעשו כרצונם שנאמר לעשות כרצון איש ואיש, כיון שראה מרדכי כך עמד והכריז עליהם ואמר להם לא תלכו לאכול בסעודתו של אחשורוש שלא הזמין אתכם כי אם ללמד עליכם קטיגוריא כדי שיהא פתחון פה עם מדת הדין לקטרטג עליכם לפני הקב"ה ולא שמעו לדברי מרדכי והלכו כולם לבית המשתה, א"ר ישמעאל שמונה עשר אלף וחמש מאות הלכו לבית המשתה ואכלו ושתו ונשתכרו ונתקלקלו, מיד עמד שטן והלשין עליהם לפני הקב"ה ואמר לפניו רבונו של עולם עד מתי תדבק באומה זו שהם מפרשישין לבבם ואמונתם ממך, אם רצונך אבד אומה זו מן העולם, כי אינם באים בתשובה לפניך. . . באותה שעה אמר הקב"ה למה לי אומה שבשבילה הרביתי אותותי ומופתים לכל הקמים עליהם לרעה (שם /דברים/ ל"ב) אשביתה מאנוש זכרם מיד אמר הקב"ה לשטן הבא לי מגילה ואכתוב עליה כלייה, באותה שעה הלך השטן והביא לו מגילה וכתב עליה מיד יצתה התורה בבגדי אלמנות ונתנה קולה בבכי לפני הקב"ה וגם מלאכי השרת צעקו לקול בכייתה, ואמרו לפניו רבש"ע אם ישראל בטלים מן העולם אנו למה אנו צריכין בעולם. . . באותה שעה רץ אליהו זכור לטוב בהחלה אצל אבות העולם, ואצל משה בן עמרם, ואמר להם עד מתי אבות העולם רדומים בשינה ואי אתם משגיחים על הצרה שבניכם שרויין בה כי מלאכי השרת וחמה ולבנה וכוכבים ומזלות ושמים וארץ וכל צבא המרום בוכים במרד ואתם עומדים מנגד ואינכם משגיחים, אמרו לו מפני מה, אמר להם מפני שנהנו ישראל מסעודתו של אחשורוש ובעבור זאת נגזרה עליהם גזירה לכלותם מן העולם ולאבד את זכרם, אמרו לו אברהם יצחק ויעקב אם הם עברו על דת הקב"ה ונחתמה גזירתם מה אנו יכולים לעשות, חזר אליהו ואמר לו למשה אי רועה נאמן כמה פעמים עמדת על הפרץ לישראל ובטלת גזירתם לבלתי השחית. . . אמר לו משה כלום יש אדם כשר באותו הדור אמר לו יש ושמו מרדכי, אמר לו לך והודיעו כדי שיעמוד הוא משם בתפלה ואני מכאן ונבקש רחמים עליהם לפני הקב"ה, אמר לו רועה נאמן כבר נכתבה אגרת כלייה על ישראל, אמר לו משה אם בטיט היא חתומה, תפלתנו נשמעת, ואם בדם נחתמה מה שהיה הוא, אמר לו בטיט היא חתומה, אמר לו משה רבינו לך והודיע למרדכי, מיד הלך והודיע למרדכי, הה"ד ומרדכי ידע את כל אשר נעשה ויקרע מרדכי את בגדיו

Haman said to Ahasueros, "The God of [the Jewish people] hates lust. Get prostitutes for them, and make a party for them, and decree that they should come and eat and drink, and do whatever they want". . . When Mordechai saw this, he got up and made an announcement and said, "Do not go and eat at Ahasueros's party, for he only invited you in order that there should be testimony against you—in order to give an opening for testimony against you to God." They did not listen to Mordechai's words and they all went to the party. Rabbi Yishmael said that 18,500 people went to the party, and ate and drank and got drunk and sinned.

Immediately, Satan got up and spoke against them before God, and said to God, "Master of the world, how long are you going to stick by this people, who are not faithful to you? Don't you want to destroy this people, for they are not going to come and repent to you!" At that moment, God said, "What do I need with this people, for whom I did many signs and wonders to ward off all who plotted against them?!" . . . Right away, God said to Satan, "Bring me a scroll, and I will write a decree of destruction against them." At that moment, Satan went and brought a scroll, and God wrote this. Immediately, the Torah came out dressed in a widow's clothes and started to weep before God. And also, the angels cried out with tears, and said to God, "If Israel disappears from the world, what need does the world have for us?" . . .

At the same time, Elijah ran, in panic, to the forefathers, and to Moses, and said to them, "How long will the forefathers of the world slumber—aren't you paying attention to the suffering that your children are enduring? For all of the angels, and the sun and the moon and the stars and heaven and earth and all of the celestial beings are crying in protest, and you are standing there not even paying attention!" They said to him, "For what reason?" He said to them, "The Jewish people enjoyed Ahasueros's party, and for this, it has been decreed that they will be destroyed from the world and their memory will be erased." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob said to him, "If they have transgressed God's religion and if the decree has been sealed, what can we do?"

Elijah returned and said to Moses, "Faithful shepherd, how many times did you stand up for Israel and overturn a decree, such that they were not destroyed?" . . . Moses said to him, "Is there any righteous person in this generation?" Elijah said, "There is one, and his name is Mordechai." Moses said, "Go, let him know that he should stand there in prayer, and I will stand here, and together we will plead mercy from God." Elijah said, "Faithful shepherd, the decree of destruction has already been written." Moses said, "If it is sealed in cement, our prayer will be heard; if in blood, it will be carried out." Elijah said, "It is sealed in cement." Moses said, "Go tell Mordechai." Right away, Elijah went and told Mordechai. For this reason, it says, "Mordechai knew all that had been done, and tore his clothes" -- Midrash Esther Rabbah 7:14



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The Possibility of Purim

One of the most striking elements of *Megillat Esther* (the Book of Esther), read on the holiday of Purim, is the absence of God from the text. Bothered by this absence, commentators have traditionally read the word “the king,” wherever it appears, as simultaneously signifying “King Ahasueros” and “God.” This device leads to some interesting interpretations, one of which appears on the opposite side of this page. In the Book of Esther, King Ahasueros is unable to sleep one night, and calls for his servants to bring his “Book of Remembrances,” in which he records significant events in his life and in the life of his kingdom. Reading this book, Ahasueros is reminded that Mordechai, who will become one of the heroes of the story, once saved the king from assassination. Ahasueros remembers that he never honored Mordechai for this act of courage and asks Haman, the villain, who happens to be standing in the next room, for advice on honoring a deserving person. Assuming that the king wishes to honor him, Haman suggests that this “man of honor” be led on a white horse through the city. Pleased with the idea, Ahasueros orders Haman to lead Mordechai on such a parade.

The midrash (interpretive rabbinic text) on this verse rereads this incident of the king’s awakening as referring to God awakening to the danger facing the Jews of Shushan, whom Haman has vowed to destroy. According to this text, the Jews find themselves in danger because God has fallen asleep, and has forfeited responsibility for protecting the Jewish people. Just as Ahasueros awakes and notices his unfulfilled responsibility toward Mordechai, God, according to this midrash, awakes and notices the need to save the Jewish people from destruction. According to this text, the salvation of the Jews begins when God awakes and begins to pay attention to the people’s suffering.

The second midrash on this page offers a very different understanding of the source of the people’s salvation. In this text, the Jewish people sin and God, egged on by Satan—who in Jewish texts represents an adversary who often challenges God—decides to destroy the people. Elijah the prophet, whom rabbinic texts often portray as a protector of the Jewish people, springs into motion and tries to persuade Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to plead on behalf of the people. When this attempt fails, Elijah reaches out to Moses who, in the Torah, repeatedly defends the Jewish people to an angry God. Moses indicates that the Jews can be saved only if at least one righteous person remains among the otherwise sinful people. Finding a partner in Mordechai, Moses initiates a simultaneous heavenly and earthly prayer effort that succeeds in overturning God’s decree.

This second midrash offers the possibility that one righteous person can make possible the overturning of evil. While Mordechai alone may not be able to save the Jewish people from destruction, his existence and continued righteousness makes the salvation possible.

Two different midrashim, two different understandings of the source of redemption. The first places the responsibility for redemption outside of the human realm, while the second suggests that even a single human being may play a crucial role in effecting the redemption of the world. While the first may be comforting in its acknowledgement that the divine presence often seems to be entirely missing from our world, the second empowers us to believe that even one righteous person has the potential to reverse even the seemingly most impossible situation.