

Purim and Prayer: The Daily Relevance of Two Glaring Omissions

Congregation Keter Torah

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#1- A Puzzling Absence

1. תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף יד עמוד א

אי הכי הלל נמי נימא! - לפי שאין אומרים הלל על נס שבחוצה לארץ... רב נחמן אמר: קרייתא זו הלילא, רבא אמר: בשלמא התם הללו עבדי ה' - ולא עבדי פרעה, אלא הכא - הללו עבדי ה' ולא עבדי אחשורוש? אכתי עבדי אחשורוש אנן

Rav Nachman said: The reading of the Megilla itself is *hallel*.

2. רמב"ם הלכות מגילה וחנוכה פרק ג הלכה ו

ולא תקנו הלל בפורים שקריאת המגילה היא ההלל

The [rabbis] did not institute [recitation of] Hallel on Purim because the reading of the Megillah is its Hallel.

3. בית הבחירה (מאירי) מסכת מגילה דף יד עמוד א

דבר ידוע הוא שאין אומרי' הלל בפורים אבל טעם מניעתו נחלקו עליו בגמ' והוא שאחד מהם אמר שקריאתה זו היא הלולא ונראה לי לטעם זה שאם היה במקום שאין לו מגלה שקורא את ההלל שהרי לא נמנעה קריאתו אלא מפני שקריאת המגלה במקומו

... if one is in a place that there is no Megillah, he should recite Hallel because the only reason why Hallel is not recited is that it was replaced by the reading of the Megillah.

4. Rabbi Abraham R. Besdin, "Reflections of the Rav," vol. 1 pgs. 43-44

The Megillah is both a book of Thanksgiving and a **book of Distress and Petition**... The Megillah is a book of contradictions. It is filled with events that are unreasonable, even absurd, coincidental, pure chance. At one moment the Jews live in security in Persia; at the next, they face destruction. Mordecai is threatened with execution; then, suddenly, he is the Prime Minister. Irrational events and moods transform fear into festivity; and entire situations are suddenly reversed. Purim **epitomizes the instability, uncertainty, and vulnerability which characterize human life** generally but particularly govern the destiny of the Jews... **The Megilla is the book of the vulnerability of man.**

5. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Days of Deliverance," pg. 7

In fact, the *Hallel* service, the exalted song of joy, consists of two parts: praise and thanksgiving, on the one hand, **and prayer and petition, on the other**. For instance, Psalms 113 ("Hallelujah! Give praise, O servants of the Lord") and 114 ("When Israel went out of Egypt") belong to the

category of praise and thanksgiving. But others, like Psalm 115 ("Not to us, O Lord, not to us") or 116 ("I love the Lord Who hears my voice"), like the famous refrain, "Save us, O Lord, we pray You," represent petition and supplication. **It is strange. Just minutes before, I was singing a great triumphant song of triumph—"When Israel went out of Egypt"—and now I see myself forsaken and forgotten; I appeal for help from the Almighty: "Save us, O Lord, we pray You"—help me because I am lonely, I am lost. To recite *Hallel* means to sing and to cry at the same time.**

6. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Days of Deliverance," pg. 6

There is a halakhic conclusion to be drawn from the **vulnerability of man**, particularly the sudden change that occurs in his life, the unexpected blow, the surprise attack. **The halakhic factor that engenders the obligation to pray, the *mehayyev*, is need, human need. Without human need, prayer would be an impossibility.**

While the mystical view of prayer, for instance placed emphasis upon praise and thanksgiving, Judaism placed the accent upon petitionary prayer, the so-called selfish, egotistical prayer; and that prayer is the result of need. If there is no need, if a man feels happy and satisfied- that all his needs have been gratified- there is no need for prayer; indeed he should not pray. Then **every bracha would be a *bracha levatala*. If man prays three times daily, it is because he is in constant need.** Why is man in constant need? ***Because he is vulnerable.***

Even if one is healthy, he prays, "Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed." Why should I petition God for healing? I don't need any medical help. **But I know not how I will feel five minutes hence.** A very rich man, a millionaire, asks God that he provides him with a livelihood. Why? **The man knows nothing about the following day, about the morrow.**

If we take into consideration human vulnerability, we must arrive at one conclusion. **There is no complete redemption.** Of course, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning?" (Psalms 30:6). At night man was in distress; in the morning he woke up and found himself free, breathing the clear air of God's boundless spaces. **Yet, what his fate will be the next morning he does not know.** Vulnerability is the great tragic experience of man.

#2- Where Is God's Name and the Modern Challenges of Tefilla?

7. תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת ברכות פרק ב הלכה ד

א"ר חייא רובא אנא מן יומי לא כוונת אלא חד זמן בעי מכוונה והרהרית בלבי ואמרית מאן עליל קומי מלכא קדמי ארקבסה אי ריש גלותא. שמואל אמר אנא מנית אפרוחיא. רבי בון בר חייא אמר אנא מנית דימוסיא. א"ר מתניה אנא מחזק טיבו לראשי דכד הוה מטי מודים הוא כרע מגרמיה:

Rabbi Chiya said of himself that he was never able to have kavana throughout his entire prayer. Once, when he tried to concentrate during his prayer, he began to ponder who is more important before the king, this minister or that minister. Shmuel said, "I counted newly hatched

chicks while I was praying.” Rabbi Bon Bar Chiya said: “While I was praying I counted the rows (of bricks) of the building.” Rabbi Matanyah said, “I am grateful for my head, for even when I am not paying attention to what I am saying, it knows by itself to bow at *Modim*.”

8. Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, “Can Prayer Be Meaningful?: Feeling the Presence of God,” 24

Tefillah presents, for me, **the most formidable challenge I face** as someone trying to be a responsible and committed Jew... How is it possible to recite the same exact words thousands of times and identify emotionally with what is being recited?

9. אבן עזרא אסתר הקדמה

והנה אין במגילה הזאת זכר השם והיא מספרי הקודש!
Behold, there is no mention of the Name [of G-d] in this scroll, and it is one of the holy books!

10. Rabbi Hayyim Angel, “*Peshat and Derash in Megillat Esther*”

The omission of God’s name and prayer is even more striking when we contrast the Masoretic Text with the Septuagint additions to the Megillah—where the Jews pray to God and God intervenes on several occasions. In the Septuagint version, **God’s Name appears over fifty times**. It appears unmistakable that **the author of the Megillah intended to stifle references to God** and Jewish religious practice.

11. שמות פרק י"ז

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר לָנוּ אַנְשִׁים וְצֵא הַלֶּחֶם בְּעֶמְלִיק מִחֹר אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל רֹאשׁ הַגְּבֻעָה וּמִטָּה הָאֱלֹקִים בְּיָדִי... (יא) וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר יֵרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגִבְרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִאֲשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ וְגִבְרַת עֶמְלִיק... (יג) וַיַּחְלֹשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת עֶמְלִיק וְאֵת עֲמוֹ לִפְיִי חָרַב...

12. תלמוד בבלי מסכת ראש השנה דף כ"ט עמוד א

והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וגבר ישראל וגו' וכי ידיו של משה עושות מלחמה או שוברות מלחמה אלא לומר לך כל זמן שהיו ישראל מסתכלין כלפי מעלה ומשעבדין את לבם לאביהם שבשמים היו מתגברים ואם לאו היו נופלים

13. Rabbi Haim Sabato, *Mevakshei Panekha: Conversations With Rav Lichtenstein*, 122

What leads a person to prayer is generally a feeling of dependence upon God. This feeling of dependence has declined in the modern world. Once, a person who fell ill knew that his fate was in God’s hands; one seeking a livelihood felt that his future was in the hands of God, and nations going out to war raised their eyes to heaven. **Today, as a result of the astounding developments in medicine, technology, and the sciences generally, our confidence has increased, while our sense of dependence has waned.** Even if someone knows that the success of the doctor is dependent upon divine assistance, it is hard to say that he feels this in the

depths of his heart. It is clear that the world and man are dependent upon God at every moment... but many people do not have [that] feeling... **Such a phenomenon is likely to undermine the natural desire to pray.**