***Esther’s Role in Geulas Purim***

Reading the Megillah on Purim is a time bound mitzvah and in truth women should be exempt from this.  The poskim (see Rashbam Pesachim 108b) teach us that since Esther brought about the salvation of Klal Yisrael, all women are obligated in the Megillah.  Although Mordechai definitely had a major part in the salvation, Chazal consider Esther as the one who brought the salvation.  How can we understand that her role was greater than that of Mordechai?

At the end of the fourth perek (4,11 - 15) of the Megillah there is a perplexing exchange between Esther and Mordechai.  Mordechai tells her that she has to risk her life to beseech the salvation of Klal Yisrael and Esther replies back that she will be called in anyway soon and why should she risk her life (Alshich and Malbim; see also Ohr Chadash).  Mordechai replies back that if Esther is quiet now she and her family may not be saved.  Seemingly Esther’s argument is very logical; why did Mordechai push her in a different direction?

Esther came from Rachel whose mida was silence, as Chazal (Bereshis Rabba 71,5) teach us Rachel grabbed the plach (staff) of silence and she merited children who were silent as the verse (Megillah 2,20) testifies “Esther did not relate which nation she was from”.  Until this time Esther had faithfully followed Mordechai’s instructions and kept silent.  Now Mordechai was asking her to make a complete about face – instead of hiding which nation she was from, to actively go to Achashverosh and to tell him.  This represented a complete deviation from her normal mida of silence.

Furthermore, by going into Achashverosh without being called, Esther risked being killed for no reason.  Furthermore, since she was entering willfully, she would definitely become forbidden to continue being married to Mordechai.  In order to follow Mordechai’s instruction she had to fast for at least three days (and maybe more) until all of her strength was depleted, and even those helping her and all the Jewish people fasted, so that she would be completely without any assistance.  What was behind this vigorous schedule?

Esther felt that she could bring the yeshua through natural means, and therefore did not see a need to risk her life for this.  Mordechai understood that in order for Klal Yisrael to have salvation there was a need to transcend natural means, and therefore there was a need for complete Mesiras Nefesh on the part of Esther.  This meant she literally had to be willing to give up everything for the sake of Klal Yisrael - her physical strength (through intense fasting), her marriage, and her life.

The Alshich (Megillah 2,5) adds that the reason that Haman was alive was because Shaul did not listen to the instructions of Shmuel to kill Agag right away.  Because of that delay Agag had a child, and from that child Haman was later born.  Esther on the other hand put aside all of her logical arguments and listened completely to Mordechai’s command, and in that merit she rectified the transgression of her ancestor Shaul and she brought about the death of Haman.

***Applying Esther’s Mesiras Nefesh to the Rest of the Year***

Esther was moser nefesh and this brought about a number of practical ramifications:

* The mesiras nefesh of Esther was the impetus for the geula of Purim and this made a major impact on Klal Yisrael.  Women are obligated to hear the Megillah and do all of the mitzvos of Purim because the salvation came through Esther (Mishnah Berurah 695,25).
* Chazal tell us that right after Mordechai’s exchange with Esther, Mordechai declared a taanis for three days.  These three days were the first three days of Pesach (Megillah 15a).  Geula needs complete Mesiras Nefesh even if it means turning Yom Tov into a taanis.  The Shulchan Aruch (686.3) writes that some people have the minhag to fast the Monday-Thursday-Monday after Purim to remember these fasts (Mishnah Berurah 686,8).
* On Rosh Hashanah, we are all judged for our actions of the previous year.  Whoever understands what this means recognizes that this is truly life threatening for no one can stand up to Hashem’s din.  The Abudraham explains that just like Esther said (Megillah 4,16) “U’vchen avo el hamelech”, “And thus I will come to the king…”, we start the Yomim Norayaim tefilos with the word “U’vchen”, since we are giving ourselves over completely into Hashem’s hands.

***A Prototype For the Future Geula***

The Maharal explains that Geula is a completely new reality and it can only come if there is a complete destruction of the previous world. This is the reason that the birth pains of Moshiach are called chevlei moshiach, for they are like the birth pains of a baby, where a woman goes through a life changing experience (Nida 9a).  So too the world needs to be turned around completely before the geula can come.

For this reason Esther needed to be ready to give up everything n order for the Jewish people to be redeemed from the hands of the gezeira which was incumbent on them.  This is the reason why Chazal teach us that it was in the zechus of Esther that we were saved on Purim.

Chazal teach us that the future Geula will be like the Geula of Purim. Just like on Purim we turned to Hashem as a result of the gezeira of Haman, so too in the future, Hashem will bring a king in the likes of Haman against us, and he will force us to turn to Hashem in teshuva (Sanhedrin 97b).

Chazal explain (Berachos 13a) that all of the miracles that Hashem has done for us throughout the ages will all be forgotten in the future when Hashem reveals Himself at the time of the geula.  Rav Sternbuch (Teshuvos and Hanhagos 2,244) explains that the geula of Purim will not be forgotten for during Purim Hashem revealed Himself through teva, and in the future we will understand that all of what seems like nature was really Hashem’s hand working behind the scenes.  This was the true revelation of the geula of Purim – that all of what looked like din and destruction was actually Hashem bringing us closer and closer.  For this reason Purim will be celebrated even after the final Geula.

***Our Job Today***

Why did the chatayim (sins) of Klal Yisrael merit our destruction and how did Esther’s mesiras nefesh annul this gezira?
The purpose of Jewish people’s entire existence is to reveal and publicize Hashem’s honor.  Klal Yisrael was choteh as a tzibor by getting pleasure at the seudah of Achashverosh where Hashem’s honor was disgraced when the kelim of the Beis Hamikdash were used to serve food at His seudah.  Since the whole purpose of Klal Yisrael is to bring out Hashem’s honor in this world, when we defile His honor there is no longer a purpose for our existence.  The only way to rectify this situation is to return Hashem’s honor.

Giving up one’s life to save Jewish people is the ultimate Kiddush Hashem.  When Esther was ready to do this, it was a great revelation of Hashem’s honor.  She brought back Hashem’s honor to the world, thereby reinstating the purpose of Klal Yisrael and causing an annulment of the decree to destroy us.

In truth the revelation of Hashem’s honor in this world cannot properly take place as long as Amalek is still strong.  Chazal teach us that before the Beis Hamikdash can be rebuilt the descendants of Amalek have to be destroyed.  In that light the Yaaros Devash (1,17) writes that right after the Amalekim were destroyed in the Purim story, the Second Beis Hamikdash was built.  When the Jewish people reach the level where there can be a complete revelation of Hashem’s honor, the geula will come.  This is our job today.

Hashem’s honor is being disgraced today in all ways and we all have to ask ourselves “What can I do to increase Hashem’s honor in the world?”  We need to increase our sensitivity to what is going on and be bothered by what is happening around us, and think deeply about what we can do to increase Hashem’s honor in the world.  Every time we do something to increase Hashem’s honor in the world, we are bringing the geula closer and closer.  The more this becomes a regular part of our lives, the closer we are to the geula.
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Chazal (Sotah 11b) say that in the merit of righteous women we were redeemed from Mitzrayim.  In the merit of increasing Hashem’s honor in the world, may we all merit the final redemption soon, amen.

