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## SOMETIMES 90% IS ENOUGH. SOMETIMES WE NEED MORE!

### PARSHAS KI-SISA-PURIM

One evening, a man named Rafael came to see Rav Shimshon Pincus. With tears steaming down his face, Rafael told Rabbi Pincus what was troubling him. Rav Pincus thought for a moment and told Rafael to return at 2 o'clock in the morning. Rafael was puzzled by the strange request, but he was willing to do anything to get his tefillos answered. When Rafael returned, Rabbi Pincus took him outside to his car. They drove to a deserted place where it was pitch black. Rabbi Pincus told Rafael that he was going to leave him alone and would return in half an hour. Rabbi Pincus told him that he would be alone with Hashem. He should daven to Hashem for his needs. Rafael davened. When Rabbi Pincus returned, he said to Rafael, "I see that you davened, but where are your tears?" With that, Rabbi Pincus said that he was going to leave and return in another half an hour. Rafael realized that only Hashem could help him. Rafael concentrated hard, davening and crying. Suddenly he felt very close to Hashem. When Rabbi Pincus returned, Rafael did not even hear the car. He was so busy concentrating and crying to Hashem. Rabbi Pincus noticed Rafael's sweat pouring down his face, intermingled with tears. "This is true tefillah", Rabbi Pincus said. "I am confident that your tefillos will be answered." Some time later, Rafael's tefillos were indeed answered! (*Living Emunah For Children* by Rabbi David Ashear)

"If it seems good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him" (Megillas Esther 5:4). Queens Esther invited Haman as the only guest to a private party that she was throwing for her husband, King Achashverosh. What motivated Esther to invite Haman?

The **Talmud** (Megillah 15B) lists twelve possible reasons. The following are some of the reasons: Rabbi Meir says that Esther invited him in order that he be near her, at all times. She wanted to prevent Haman from acting against Achashverosh when he would discover that the king would be angry at him. Rabbi Nechemya says that she did this so that the Jewish people would not say, "We have a sister in the king's house", and consequently neglect their prayers for divine mercy. Rabbi Yossi says that she acted in this manner, so that Haman would always be on hand for her, as that would enable her to find an opportunity to cause him to stumble before the king. Rabbi Shimon ben Menasiya said that Esther said to herself, 'Perhaps Hashem will take notice that all are supporting Haman,

*"If Your Majesty will do me the favor, if it please Your Majesty to grant my wish and accede to my request—let Your Majesty and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare for them; and tomorrow I will do Your Majesty's bidding." (Megillas Esther 5:8)*

and nobody is supporting the Jewish people, and He will perform a miracle for us.' Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha says that she said to herself, 'I will act kindly toward him and thereby bring the king to suspect that we are having a relationship'. She did so in order that both Haman and she be killed. Essentially, Esther was willing to be killed together with Haman in order that the decree be

annulled. Rabban Gamliel says that Achashverosh was a fickle king. Esther hoped that if Achashverosh would see Haman on multiple occasions, eventually Achashverosh would change his opinion of Haman. Rabban Gamliel says in the name of Rabbi Eliezer HaModai that Esther wanted to make Achashverosh jealous of Haman. She also wanted to make the other ministers jealous of him. In this way, she hoped to bring about his downfall. Rabba says that Esther invited Haman to her banquet to fulfill that which is stated, "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18), which indicates that to destroy the wicked, one must first bring them to pride. The Gemara relates that Rabba bar Avuha once met the Prophet

Eliyahu and asked which of the 12 reasons was correct. What was the true reason behind inviting Haman to the party? Eliyahu answered that Esther was motivated by **all** the reasons previously mentioned.

Rabbi Nechemya's reason was so that the Jewish people should not feel that they had a "sister" in the king's house and consequently neglect their prayers for divine mercy. According to Rabbi Nechemya, Esther wanted the Jewish People to think that she was betraying them and joining Haman. They would no longer be able to rely on her to save them from Haman's decree and they would intensify their tefillos, realizing that only Hashem can save them.

Obviously, it pained Esther to make the Jews feel this way but she understood that only tefillah would save them and this action would serve to cause them to intensify their tefillah.

Why would Esther's actions make a difference in their intensity of tefillah? Did the Jews think that Esther would be able to help them? The decree against them was already sealed by the king's signet ring. The Queen was powerless- she wasn't even permitted to see her husband without his explicit permission. In fact, the **Megillah** tells us that when Esther did go to Achashverosh unannounced, attempting to save the Jews, Achashverosh flew into a rage. He felt, how dare she come without permission! He was about to have her killed for this "crime". Esther was only saved through a miracle. The **Talmud** (Megillah 15B) says that three ministering angels joined her at that time. One raised her neck, so that she could stand erect, free of shame, one strung a cord of divine grace around her, endowing her

with charm and beauty, and one stretched the king's scepter. The lowering of the scepter showed that the king was permitting Esther to come, thus saving her life.

The Jewish People were probably aware of this law that the queen did not even have permission to see the king. They realized that Esther was powerless to help them. They understood that only Hashem could help them, and that they needed to daven with intensity. So why did Esther have to cause herself and the Jewish People unnecessary pain by pretending to join Haman?

The answer is that the Jewish People certainly understood, on an intellectual level, that they were in perilous danger and that Esther was unable to help them. However, on an emotional level, to some slight degree they felt that since Esther was in the palace, they did not have to fear. This feeling was totally illogical, but to some small degree it existed. It gave them a false sense of security. This slight feeling was enough to weaken the Jews' tefillah slightly, so that they did not daven with totally complete hearts.

Therefore, Esther devised this plan. She wanted the Jews to totally lose hope that she would save them. Esther understood the great importance of every extra little bit of heartfelt prayer. She understood that the extra little bit could mean the difference between success and failure. That higher level tefillah, with even just 1% more intensity, could be the tefillah that Hashem would respond to. A tefillah with even 1% less heartfelt concentration may not have been enough to pierce the heavens. Esther wanted their prayers and repentance to be as powerful as possible, so that Hashem would annul the decree against them.

**There is so much that we need to daven for. We each have our personal needs as well as the needs of Jews all around the world. When we daven to Hashem we should try to focus with as much intensity and concentration as possible.**

**Sometimes that higher level of concentration is needed for our tefillos to pierce the heavens.**

Based on a dvar Torah by Rabbi Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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