

THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON!

PARSHAS TETZAVEH – SPECIAL PURIM ISSUE

The evil Prime Minister, Haman, convinced King Achashverosh to annihilate every single Jew. **Rashi** (Megillas Esther 4:1) says that Mordechai, who was the leader of the Jews, was told about this terrible decree, in a dream. He was told that the punishment had been decreed because the Jews had bowed to the idol in the days of Nevuchadnetzar, and because they had enjoyed Achashverosh's feast. Mordechai's response to this news was, "And Mordechai tore his garments and clothed himself in sack and ashes; and he went out in the midst of the city, and he cried out a great and bitter cry". The **Maharzu** and **Eitz Yosef** (Midrash Rabbah Shmos 38:4) explain that Mordechai's "crying" refers to tefillah, prayer.

Although the actual decree of annihilation was scheduled to take place in eleven months hence, Mordechai felt that the Jews were in an exceedingly dangerous situation. He sent a message to Queen Esther to immediately approach King Achashverosh and beg him to save the Jewish People. Esther responded that there was a death penalty for anyone approaching the king without first getting permission. If she would go to the king now, she would be placing her life in danger. She felt that it was prudent to wait until the king called for her. She said that he would probably call for her sometime soon, as he had not seen her for almost 30 days. Mordechai felt that the situation was so serious that he told Esther that she should go anyway, despite the danger to her life. Esther agreed to go but requested that the Jews fast for three days beforehand. In that merit she would be successful in her mission. The last day of the fasting was the night of the first Pesach seder. If the Jews would be fasting, that they would not be able to fulfill the Torah requirement of eating matza at the seder. They would also be unable to fulfill the Rabbinic mitzva of drinking the 4 cups of wine and eating marror. Despite that, Mordechai agreed that all the Jews should fast.

*"Mordechai tore his garments and ... cried out a great and bitter cry."
(Megillas Esther 4:1)*

Later in the Purim story, there was a turn-around of events. Mordechai was honored greatly while Haman was humiliated. The **Midrash** (Esther Rabbah 10:4-5) tells us what occurred. "The king said to Haman: Hurry, take the garments and the horse as you have said. Do so to Mordechai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Do not omit anything that you spoke of."

Haman went to Mordechai and told him to put on the royal garments. Mordechai responded, "Why are you dishonoring the monarchy? Is there any man who would put on royal garments without bathing?" Haman went and sought a bath attendant but could not find one. Queen Esther had declared a national holiday, closing all the schools and stores. She wanted everyone to witness Haman's humiliation. Since there was no bath attendant available, Haman who had previously been a bath attendant, was forced to bathe Mordechai himself. After the bath, Haman told Mordechai to put on the king's crown. Mordechai said to him, "Why are you dishonoring the monarchy? Is there any man who would put on a royal crown without a haircut?" Haman searched for a barber but could not find one. What did he do? Haman, who had been a barber for many years, gave Mordechai a

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haircut. Then Haman told Mordechai to mount the horse. Mordechai said, "I do not have the strength [to mount it], for I am old." Haman responded that he too was also old. Mordechai said to Haman that he had brought this upon himself. Thereupon, Haman bent down on his hands and knees to allow Mordechai to step on him to mount the horse. Then Haman led Mordechai on the horse through the city square, proclaiming, "So shall be done to the man that the king wishes to honor!" (Megillas Esther 6:10-11)

The Midrash continues that while Mordechai was riding the horse, he began praising Hashem. "I will exalt You, Hashem, for You have lifted me up and have not caused my enemies to rejoice over me. Hashem, I cried out to You, and You have healed me. Hashem, You brought my soul up from the grave. You have given me life that I not go down to a pit." (Psalms 30:2-4).

Clearly, the tide was beginning to turn. It appeared that Haman's downfall had begun. When Haman returned home, even his wife and other advisors told

him that his downfall was a foregone conclusion (Megillas Esther 6:13). Yet, as soon as Mordechai completed his ride, **Rashi** says (6:12) that he went back to wearing sackcloth and fasting.

We would think that at this point, Mordechai would not be praying with the same intensity as before. After all, he had experienced the beginning of the tide turning. Yet, the **Maharzu** comments on the **Midrash Rabbah** in this week's parsha (Shmos 38:4) that when Mordechai returned to sackcloth and prayer, he prayed with the same level of intensity as previously. Mordechai's prayer at this time, despite the onset of Haman's downfall, was as powerful as when he had first found out about the harsh decree.

It is amazing that Mordechai was able to pray with the same deep feelings when he clearly saw Haman's downfall quickly occurring! It is also amazing that he felt the necessity to do so! He understood that the Jews were still in danger, and that Hashem could, just as easily, turn things back around if the Jews were not deserving.

When we are in need, we turn to our most powerful weapon, prayer. Sincere prayer from the depths of our heart is very powerful and productive. Hashem does not always give us the answer that we want. However, our prayers can make a difference now, and for our future generations. Our prayers may even help one of our future descendants in need. Even if we see that our prayers are beginning to help, we must not let up.

We must continue praying with the same fervor and intensity as before. We cannot take anything for granted, as situations can quickly change and turn back around.

When, with Hashem's help, we do see salvation, we must continue our heartfelt prayers, expressing our thanks and appreciation to Hashem.

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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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