

## **BS"D**

Dedicated in memory, and to elevate the soul, of Mrs. Rashi Minkowicz of blessed memory; a dedicated and inspirational shlucha to North Fulton, Georgia, taken too soon shortly before Purim five years ago. Wishing the family continued strength and comfort, and in fact a tremendous Mazal Tov, as after extensive efforts and envisioning, they finally established a beautiful permanent Chabad campus in her name, serving and educating the area's Jews - a truly wondrous legacy.

"The Story in a Nutshell" (*Courtesy of Chabad.org*)

The Persian Empire of the 4th century BCE extended over 127 lands, and all the Jews were its subjects. When King Ahasuerus had his wife, Queen Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders, he arranged a beauty pageant to find a new queen. A Jewish girl, Esther, found favor in his eyes and became the new queen, though she refused to divulge her nationality.

Meanwhile, the Jew-hating Haman was appointed prime minister of the empire.

Mordechai, the leader of the Jews (and Esther's cousin), defied the king's orders and refused to bow to Haman. Haman was incensed, and he convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all the Jews on the 13th of Adar, a date chosen by a lottery Haman made.

Mordechai galvanized all the Jews, convincing them to repent, fast and pray to G-d.

Meanwhile, Esther asked the king and Haman to join her for a feast. At a subsequent feast, Esther revealed to the king her Jewish identity. Haman was hanged, Mordechai was appointed prime minister in his stead, and a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies.

On the 13th of Adar, the Jews mobilized and killed many of their enemies. On the 14th of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the capital city of Shushan, they took one more day to finish the job.

Sisters and friends, this narrative is not just history, but repeats frequently in our lives; our past sets a precedent for the future and bears a powerful, relevant lesson for us today. “Torah” comes from “hora’ah - teaching,” a guide for life! Allow me to ask you, heart to heart: Can you think of a personal experience, where you’ve felt helpless and unguided, at the mercy of you difficult circumstances? When did it seem like all the odds were stacked against you, preventing you from actualizing your dreams and visions, or trying to suffocate the light you have to give and shine? Take a few minutes to reflect, and please, I encourage you each to share in the comments below; this is a safe-zone for you, at Jewish Girls Unite. [PAUSE.] Now that we’ve identified the challenge restraining us, let’s take a journey together, discovering how to turn that reality upside-down and liberate us from its shackles.

*On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, when the time for the carrying out of the king's edict and law had arrived, on the day the enemies of the Jews had thought they would dominate them, everything was overturned/it was reversed (“וְנִהְפֹךְ הָיָא”): the Jews dominated their enemies.*

וּבְשָׁנִים עָשָׂר ח' דָּשׁ הוֹאֲתָהּ דָּשׁ אֲדָר בְּשָׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיעַ דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת בֵּי יוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁבְרוּ  
אֵיבֵי הַיְהוּדִים לְשָׁלוֹט בָּהֶם וְנִהְפֹךְ הָיָא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹטוּ הַיְהוּדִים הַמָּה בְּשָׁנָאֵיהֶם:

*(Megillat Esther 9:1)*

Miracle of miracles! The near-successful plans of a vicious Jew-hater to annihilate our entire people were foiled. The tables turned and instead we were saved, when we united in teshuvah - returning to G-d and crying out to Him. It’s also interesting to note that G-d’s name isn’t explicitly mentioned even once throughout the entire Megillah!

Now, brace yourself for a totally radical proposal, yet one that’s been addressed, transmitted and absorbed for generations: Haman actually did us an enormous favor! Through the pain, fear and vulnerability he caused, he inspired us to communicate with Hashem in a fresh burst of spiritual energy and dedication, at a time when our

relationship with Him was weakened. Of all people, our enemy Haman spurred our deep reunion with G-d which was so passionate, that our Sages declared we re-accepted the Torah then, even more wholeheartedly than when we received it at Sinai. We transformed! Haman - like any set of troubles that beset you - embodies a force of G-dliness so elevated and intense that it must be concealed to be revealed, and cannot be expressed in an openly positive way. So, we experience adversity. This is the Divine energy - presented in disguise - that provokes you to turn inward, to that deep place of your soul from which you call to Hashem, put your trust in Him that all will be as it should, and you open yourself to His Divine plan for you. This is how we draw strength to overcome the darkness, and transform it. We see this when we were pursued by Pharaoh at the sea; when Haman arranged his "final solution" for all the Jews; when eleven holy souls were cut down at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh; whenever Jews were threatened throughout history, yes, we trembled and ached for one another, we cried out to Hashem," but our most profound response is to increase light, when we reveal and connect to G-d in our situation. Do you remember the enormity of the explosion of Torah, Mitzvos, the outpouring of kindness and unity, dedicated to the departed souls in the Pittsburgh massacre's aftermath? What does that say about the power we have as Jews?

When we find ourselves facing difficulty, sometimes, we justifiably wonder, *"Where is Hashem throughout all of this?"* We also want to lament, *"WHY? Why do these things have to happen to me this way?"* - that "why" is not for us to ask but leave to G-d, and we might never know the answer until Moshiach comes. But the question that is relevant for us, is, *"HOW? How am I going to grow from this? How will I choose to respond, and kindle a light in this darkness?"* Let that become your "why," as in your driving factor to make a change, to do something about your situation. The Lubavitcher Rebbe often spoke about how if you find yourself in a place where there is a lack, or darkness, the very reason you are privy or involved is because YOU have the ability to fill that lack and illuminate that darkness. So, why does Hashem see fit for events to

transpire in a certain way, or goodness to be obscured at times? Essentially, we can't comprehend it. As for what we do know, and hold fast to, in harmony with G-d's will WE land smack-dab into the middle of circumstances to ask ourselves, "*How does He want me to bring light, because that's the only reason He's placed me here, since I have the power to change it!*" Just like Mordechai said to Esther after Haman's decree arrived: "(Mi yodeyah) Who knows if it was for this very reason you were made queen?" Though you were forced into this lifestyle so adverse to your being as a Jewish daughter, and you were uprooted from everything familiar, now that you're here, this is your opportunity to petition on behalf of your people, and maybe even save them from the decree! How long did it take for this moment of epiphany arrive, her glimpse into the "why" of her suffering at the palace? Nine whole years of wondering; but even while it remained uncertain, she didn't become distracted by her difficult surroundings, and instead tuned inward to hear the guiding song of her soul, Hashem's will for her. Then, when the time arrived, she was prepared to execute what she needed to do; connected and directed, she was resolute in her mission to serve and represent her people.

I'm not just a storm-tossed ship at the mercy of life's waves that can drown me, but where I find myself is guided by Hashem - Hashgocha Protis, Divine providence - and I am here in this darkness to make a difference by shining! I transform from "victimized" to "victorious," when I know I'm not alone but find Hashem's hand with me in my struggle, accepting His purpose here for me as my own, and with this for my compass acting on what is within my sphere of control. I can choose to bring Him into the picture of my life, reveal Him in a world that hides His involvement, and build a deeper connection with Him than could ever be achieved when things were perfectly smooth.

We all have experienced a unique thorn in our side, a personal Haman that tries to make our life miserable. What is yours? It could be our inner demons of negative thoughts, emotions or destructive habits, limiting us from blossoming into our best selves. It could be an external opposition, when our plans go totally downhill, a door is

harshly shut on a dream of ours, or barriers are set on us from our light making impact on our surroundings. It could even be a particular individual in your life who simply rubs you the wrong way. We don't always realize when we're in a victim-mode, it's so easy to slip into; we are feel entitled to feel bad when we've been hurt by another, but that's no place to remain contentedly (for lack of a better word), nor does it accomplish anything productive. Rather, whatever is your G-dsent adversary, let it motivate you to tap into your core-strengths and greatest potential from Above, to face your inner Haman, and emerge victorious. Now that he's done his job, he just melts away. "A little light dispels much darkness!"

One remarkable Jewish woman, Mrs. Toby Brickman, is no stranger to tragedy, yet she possesses the fortitude to exemplify and teach others, "Challenges are at times put in our way to test our resolve and commitment to our greater goals." Please, let us take her words from the heart, and allow them to enter our hearts. When something isn't going our way, we can give into our obstacle, or we can allow it to make us stronger by trying our resilience and faith. When we open ourselves to Hashem's plan for us - even if it's hidden, even when we face adversity - we can turn the challenge to our advantage, by recognizing it as a pointer from Heaven, directing our path towards the place He knows we can accomplish something even greater, beyond our wildest dreams! And Hashem never tests a person with a challenge they cannot overcome.

This tool and attitude will serve you your entire life: having the awareness no event is coincidental or without purpose, but it's one vital detail to a bigger picture, the MasterPlan of creation; having the ability to ask, "*What is my role here, and how does G-d want me to grow from this?*" In this way, you reverse your story from pain to purpose, light to dark - "Venahafoch hu!" You can become the Queen Esther of your own palace, and reveal the concealed Divine goodness in a negative situation. When everything seems hopeless, you can effectuate salvation, and a new beginning. When you know your purpose, every activity, chapter and subplot of your life will lend

themselves and be focused towards that end; when you decide what you want your story to be, everything will fall into place accordingly. But what kind of story will this be? The choice is yours. Hopefully, it will be reflective of your light, your unique purpose. Do you choose to view your life in helpless fragments, or instead open your eyes to the Divine providence bringing cohesion to your tale and empowering you to actualize your potential? Are you the influencer, or the influenced? Are you the author of YOUR story, or do you allow someone else to write it for you? Your challenges can help mold the structure and conflict offering depth to your story - a prelude to greater light - but they don't have independent power to affect your input and ultimate outcome. That's entirely up to you, your motivation, and your perspective. Don't let others dictate your reality and consciousness, because it's truly you and G-d who collaborate your journey, destiny, and how you want it to be recounted for all future generations!

Yes, when we create a vision for ourselves, we might face bumps and disappointment along the way; we may even feel that we hit rock-bottom, but Hashem only allows that to happen so we realize He IS the Rock at the bottom. When Esther was transferred to her seeming-prison, a drastic low-point, she always remained committed to who she was inside and what she lived for as a Jew, and discovered Hashem there, filling the palace with light as she kept His Torah and Mitzvos, albeit in secret. "Ki Atah ta'ir neiri Hashem Elokai yagiha chash'ki - For You light my lamp; Hashem, my G-d, illuminates my darkness!" It's so empowering to know we're never alone to stumble in gloom or confusion, having confidence Hashem has placed us exactly where we're meant to kindle a light and make an impact. It's our precious mission, if only we're willing to take that inspiring responsibility to illuminate our situation by recognizing Hashem's hand within it and reveal it to the world. This is why Esther fought for the story of Purim to be recorded, and what's more, canonized in the Torah to be preserved for all eternity, and teach us this very lesson. Finally, her requests were accepted, and we can thank her and G-d for the gift of Megillas Esther today. It truly models the story of each of our lives; it empowers us, Jewish daughters in every generation, to take action to secure

and strengthen ourselves, and our entire people's future, through the light of Hashem's Torah as we practically implement it day by day. ("Torah" is 'teaching,' a 'guide'!) Also, did you know that we will always have Purim, even after we enter the era of Moshiach? Why? Purim is forever because of the power it transmits to transform the heaviest darkness into the most sublime light, an essential for us anywhere, anyone, anytime.

Born from the difficult experience is renewed passion; from your darkness shines your brightest light! The terror and trials of the Purim story underwent by our ancestors actually benefited them in a paradoxical way, propelling them to before-unimaginable spiritual heights, exhilaration, clarity, and connection to Hashem, like the Megillah declares, "LaYehudim Haiysa Orah v'Simcha - The Jews had light and joy!" They turned their story inside-out, by recognizing the Divine purpose within, and transformed from victimized to victorious, by choosing to take their darkness and use it as a springboard for growth and reconnection with their souls. *"The enemies of the Jews had thought they would dominate them, everything was overturned/it was reversed: the Jews dominated their enemies."* We're not subject to the the voices which try to bring us down, but rather we are **their master**, and we can choose to rewrite the script, begin anew from the irritation we are dealing with.

Set practical goals for yourself to achieve your dream and fulfill your neshama's Shlichus (your soul's mission from Above) and never forget you are partners with Hashem in bringing it to success. Keep climbing even when the going gets tough and don't be discouraged when it takes time to transform that dream into reality. It might take a year or nine to comprehend why you're now here; a lifetime or until Moshiach, but does it really matter? "Tut altz vos ir kent - Do all that you can," now, to bring light, increase goodness and holiness in the world, even if what's around the bend is currently hidden. Just do your part, and Hashem will take care of the rest; your action may even seem small, but Hashem will respond with wonders when you initiate. Just begin writing, and things will start to flow.

Now, I would like to encourage you to envision your personal “Venahafoch Hu.” Can you try to feel the deep joy that it sparks? When there is something you want to achieve, live it as if you’ve already made it happen (with Hashem’s help). When you express your will in a concrete, tangible way, this hastens its actualization! Thank Hashem for the goodness or blessing you’ve desired as if He’s already provided it. You will become a channel for His miracles to take effect.

Your struggle, journey and ultimate climax, is your very own story - and others want to hear it! The world is nurtured and inspired by the real-life experience shared by another. It doesn’t need to be cataclysmic, but people are really thirsting for authenticity, however large or small that challenge may seem. Another important benefit of recording your story is that it enables you to look back later on and learn from it; it grants you the vision to join the puzzle-pieces together, find meaning in the struggle, and ultimately learn the great “Why?” of your path.

What is your story - your Megillah - and how does it go? Don’t wait to become its heroine, because the future is in your hands, and you are actively writing it! You are the rising Esther Hamalka, Queen Esther, of today.

*Wishing you and yours a very Happy Purim, and may you always be blessed with the utmost joy, the illumination of Torah, and the ability to perceive the bountiful hidden miracles in your life! L’chayim!*