

Rude Awakenings

פרשת תצוה

The Gemara states, “Rav Abba Bar Kahana said, greater is Achashverosh’s removal of his signet ring than 48 Neviim and 7 Nevios. They did not bring the Jewish people to Teshuva, however, the signet ring brought them to Teshuva.” The Maharsha explains this Gemara as follows: Achashverosh giving his ring to Haman showed the extent with which he hated the Jews, a hatred which was against the natural order of things. Normally when one sells an item, the seller takes security to ensure he gets paid. However, here Achashverosh gave his ring to Haman without taking security, and allowed him to pour out his wrath on the Jewish people.

The Maharsha’s explanation requires further clarification. The removal of the ring gave Haman the ability to carry out his plan to destroy the Jewish people. One would have thought that it is this that caused the Jewish people to panic and do Teshuva. However, the Maharsha says that the primary factor that caused the Jewish people to do Teshuva, was their realization that Achashverosh hated them to such a great extent. Why would this

“Only after they fell into a state of despair were they awakened to Teshuva.”

factor be a greater impetus to Teshuva than the fact that Haman now had the full power to carry out his plan of annihilating the Jews?

We can learn from here an important insight into our ability to ignore the most powerful motivators to change. 48 Neviim and 7 Nevios couldn’t awaken the Jewish people to do Teshuva. Even the King giving Haman full permission to destroy the Jewish people did not stir the Jews to Teshuva. What caught their attention was something out of the norm, a unique event that is not the way of the world. Achashverosh allowing Haman to have his ring without any security was able to snap them out of their stupor, and cause them to change.

We see from here how important it is to train ourselves to focus and to process the events and guidance we receive, so that they can be a catalyst towards change.

We can draw another insight from the Eitz Yosef’s commentary on this Gemara. He says that Achashverosh constantly changed his decrees and was constantly flipping. Therefore, until Achashverosh gave his ring to Haman to do as he pleased, the Jews had hope in Hashem that the decree would change. However, after he gave Haman his ring they lost all hope, and were spurred to Teshuvah. The Jewish people were well aware of Haman’s hatred of the Jewish people, and his power. In addition they had Mordechai warning them to do Teshuva. Yet, due to their Bitachon and hope in Hashem, they did not feel the urgency of the hour. Only after they fell into a state of despair were they awakened to Teshuva.

We see from here a powerful insight into the mechanics of hope on our ability to do Teshuva. Although we are obligated to trust in Hashem in times of suffering, hope may actually interfere with our ability to introspect and focus on the root causes of the suffering. It is therefore important to be aware of this dynamic so that we put a greater emphasis on Teshuva, while our Bitachon increases.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה
לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא