

Remember the days of old, understand the years of each generation. (32:7)

Remembrance is a major part of Jewish service to Hashem. Much of our tradition is based upon remembering what once was – our highs and lows, joys and travails. Most important, however, is the ability to see the *Yad Hashem*, guiding Hand of G-d, throughout all that occurs. The *Bostoner Rebbe, zl*, put remembrance into perspective when he said, “Remembrance is important, but we must know what to remember. Even concerning those tragedies closest to our own time, such as the Holocaust, are we to remember the pain – or the self-sacrifice – what its victims died for – or what they lived for?”

It is almost as if we make a conscious effort to ignore the “role” Hashem plays in **every** event that takes place. Perhaps the following anecdote will lend some meaning to this idea: There was once an ignorant villager who was very into the *Pesach Seder*. Regrettably, he was not much of a scholar, and even the simple basics of the *Seder* eluded him. Every year, he went searching for a guest who would help him conduct the *Seder*. One year, despite tremendous effort, he was unsuccessful in his quest. As far as he was concerned, this was a catastrophe. A *Seder* with no guest, just was not a *Seder*.

In Heaven, his efforts were not unnoticed. Indeed, the Heavens were in an uproar. How could this man’s annual expression of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice and devotion, not be considered? It just did not seem fair. After much deliberation, messengers were dispatched to the highest Heavens to summon Eliyahu *HaNavi* to descend to this world and be this simple farmer’s *Pesach Seder* guest.

During this time, the farmer was not sleeping. He came up with an idea, a way to solve his guest issue. He went to the barn and placed a hat and coat on his favorite horse and led the horse-turned-man into his house. The farmer seated his dressed-up horse at the *Seder* table, looked at his wife, and exclaimed, “See, now we have a *Pesach* guest!”

When the angels in Heaven looked down and saw the spectacle before them, they laughed. The *Baal Shem Tov* explained the reason behind their laughter. The villager had toiled for years to establish something important to him. Whatever it would take, he would have a *Pesach* guest. He succeeded, but look what he had given up! He could have had Eliyahu *HaNavi*. Instead, he had a horse! How foolish! The *Bostoner Rebbe* added that they laughed because all too often we give up the Heavenly within ourselves, that lofty spiritual dimension to which we are all privy – exchanging it for what? A brute beast! Is there anything more ridiculous than exchanging the Heavenly for the earthly?

This is our greatest problem: We ignore the spiritual and settle for the material. Success is measured in physical terms, with spiritual achievement playing a distant second. We no longer know what is truly important, what has value, what will endure. If we would only see G-d’s guiding

Hand in our lives, we would realize the critical role spirituality plays. However, one can only see if he looks. One who is sightless, either by affliction or by choice, will not see. Those who have alienated themselves from Judaism have become sightless as a result of the affliction called “assimilation.” Those who are blind by choice simply refuse to look. They are afraid of what they might see. Nowhere is selective sight more glaring than in the study of history. We choose to remember what we want. We conveniently forget those events that might bother us. What can be more traumatizing than the “discovery” of G-d in our lives, the revelation that all of the events that we have relegated to the forces of “nature” were really orchestrated by Hashem? Imagine, finding out that everything we have denied is really true.

The early secularists were acutely aware that in order to extirpate Jewish belief and observance, they had to divorce G-d from history, thereby transforming the past into events that “just happened.” Divine Providence, Hashem’s guiding Hand, reward and punishment, cause and effect, were terms they refused to acknowledge, because it implied the notion that there was purpose in this world. Purpose begets religion. If life has a reason, why are we not living it to fulfill its purpose? Essentially, we have traded Eliyahu *HaNavi* for a horse in a suit and hat. Is that not ridiculous?

Universal history is about Jewish destiny and the place it has in shaping world events. Whatever takes place anywhere in the world is for a reason. We should study its lessons and apply it to our lives. Jewish history examines world events through the ages and how they affected our destiny. Even the most isolated event does not occur in a vacuum. There is a reason for it, and we should learn its lesson and apply it to our lives. The ups and downs, the fortunes and travails, are all lessons in reward and punishment; lessons which should help us navigate the proper course of life. *Horav Moshe Sternbuch, Shlita*, says that Jewish History is not merely about times and places, various cultures and customs. It is meant to be a lesson in *emunah*, faith and *bitachon*, trust. All the nations that controlled the world in centuries past have all disappeared, their power dissipated. They are no longer of any value to Hashem. *Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl*, observes that at the conclusion of *Megillas Esther*, it says that the entire story and miracle of *Purim* is written in the annals of Paras u’Madai. Who cares? Why does the *Megillah* find it necessary to inform us of another source for the miracle of *Purim*?

Rav Abramsky explains that at first blush, the cursory reader might think that the *Megillah* is relating the *Purim* story to its readers. To dispel this error, the *Megillah* cautions us that if we want nothing more than the “*Purim* story,” we are welcome to read about it in the Persian history books. The sensation, excitement and drama that unfold in the *Purim* story are best related in the secular Persian chronicles. The details are there – the players, heroes, heroines, and villains are clearly depicted. Indeed, all the makings of a great novel are available for the reader’s delight. The *Megillah*, however, is not a history book. It was written *al pi Ruach Ha’Kodesh*, through Divine Inspiration, with the sole purpose of teaching about Divine Providence and the *chesed*, kindness, that Hashem displayed to *Klal Yisrael*. If one seeks to understand the *Yad Hashem*, guiding Hand of Hashem; if he wants to discern Hashem’s role in shaping Jewish destiny, then the *Megillah* is for

him. If, however, he simply wants a good story – a historical appreciation of the development of the Persian Jewish community – then he should read the history books. One must remember that it is not enough just to know history. One must understand it and see the guiding Hand of Hashem as He crystallizes Jewish destiny.