



תנועת בני עקיבא
BNEI AKIVA UK

Bnei Akiva

Adar: Purim-Megillat Esther – Hidden God and Human Partnership

Roshim's Guide to the Theme and Concepts

Hadracha Choveret



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BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

Includes:

1. **Roshim Guide** – this covers the theme and concepts in detail. Roshim/Sganim should read this before their meetings and understand what they will be teaching and discussing in their meetings.
2. **A Prezi** – this covers the key points in more detail and should be used as a tool to teach and discuss the Choveret in meetings.
 - a. **A PDF** of the slides for those without access to a computer, tablet, phones or in large groups.
3. **Suggested activities** – a series of activities linked to each section of the Choveret. Use these as a springboard to develop your own activities for each Sviva and to fall back on if you're struggling for ideas

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"You make a good point; we both hate the cat.
I'm just not sure what it is you'd bring to a partnership."



Hidden God and Human Responsibility

This coming Friday – 16th Feb (or past Friday depending on when you read this) is Rosh Chodesh Adar. It therefore seems appropriate to spend a bit of time considering the themes of Megillat Esther.

The major theme of Megillat Esther is a familiar one: Everything gets turned on its head - “VeNahafochu”. All the plans of the ‘humans’ in the story are overturned by God’s hidden hand in the story. It is a profoundly religious story according to this reading and emphasizes the divine power of God. Whereas earlier stories in the Torah are all about the revealed, obvious power of God - this later story is still about the power of God but hidden. The autonomy of humans is underplayed and the interpretation is that ‘even though people might make all their plans God is ultimately then one who decides if anything comes of them’.

A man may plot out his course, But it is the LORD who directs his steps. (Mishlei 16:9)	לֵב אָדָם יִשֶׁב דַּרְסָאָהוּ יְכִין צִעְדָּו:
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This model of the story is one that has God as very involved in history and the world, and conversely humanity is submissive to God.

However there is an alternate reading that reads it slightly differently. This reading is one that is more accurate to how Modern Orthodox figures (from Rav Hirsch to Rav Soloveitchik) have understood humanity’s relationship with God. What is that relationship?

➔ Shutafut – Partnership with God.

This model emphasizes that God and Humanity work in partnership together, and that is something that God specifically wants. Whilst God does have absolute power, God limits himself so that humanity has a role in history, in Halacha, in personal affairs, in medicine and in all sorts of areas. Humanity has to take an active role in these areas and not ‘leave things to God’, otherwise nothing will happen. This model/world-view emphasizes the autonomy and power of Humanity.

Megillat Esther, the quintessential Diaspora narrative, tells a story of God hidden (limited) in the story and of the heroism of the human characters. The story can be read where it is only by the active participation and initiative of the human characters (Mordechai and Esther primarily) that the story is a triumphant one. Mordechai and Esther take a number of steps to ensure their success and shrewd political operatives - manipulating or ‘playing’ the situation to give them the highest chance of success. Examples:

- Mordechai positioning himself to be in the best place to overhear the plotting of Bigtan and Teresh.
- Mordechai playing the court and antagonising Haman to protest the more and more power he gets from Achashverosh.
- Esther lulling the King into a false sense of security through multiple parties.
- Esther getting the King drunk to ensure a more favourable outcome.



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There are many more examples – a good book to read on this topic is Yoram Hazony's "God and Politics in Esther". A reprint of the very popular 1995 "The Dawn".

The story of Megillat Esther is a story that might be familiar to our lives in the sense that today (and for the last 2500 years) God has been hidden from us. There is no active prophecy, no obvious miracles and no 'proof' of God's existence. This presents an obvious challenge: what then is the role of humanity when God is not easy to find?

The response of Chazal all the way to contemporary Modern Orthodox figures has been to emphasize the partnership relationship we have with God. Whereas when God was revealed and obvious, God was the more active partner in the relationship. When God is less active, then it is our turn to pick up the slack and be the active ones.

We see this in a number of ways:

1. **Halachic/Legal:** The story of "the oven of akhnai" in Bava Metzia 59b has the overarching message that Torah is "not in heaven" and that we have the authority to interpret and legislate according to our own understanding.
→ We are the ones who are active in the Halachic relationship.

In Chamesh Derashot Rav Soloveitchik writes about a "14th Ani Maamin":

"I believe with complete and perfect faith that this Torah is given to be observed, realised and fully carried out in every place and in every time, in all social, economic and cultural frameworks, in every technological circumstance and all political conditions"

It is our job to carry out this application of Halacha to the reality/society we find ourselves in today, and to not shy away from that task.

2. **Suffering:** The statement of Abaye in Berachot 60a tells of the permission given to doctors to heal people. This expresses the legitimacy and importance of acting to alleviate human suffering. We are not supposed to wait for God to heal us.
→ We are the ones who are active in the medical relationship.

Abaye responded and said: One should not say this, as it was taught in the school of Rabbi Yishmael that from the verse, "And shall cause him to be thoroughly healed" (Exodus 21:19), from here we derive that permission is granted to a doctor to heal.

אמר אביי לא לימא אינש הכי דתני
דבי רבי ישמעאל (שמות כא, יט)
ורפא ירפא מכאן שניתנה רשות
לרופא לרפאות

3. **In perfecting Creation:** The Gemara in Shabbat 119b tells of how we can view humanity as partners in creation (in this particular context it is through the recitation of Kiddush but the broader point applies).
4. **In History?:** The story of Megillat Esther and indeed the whole of Jewish history presents the challenge to us – do we take an active role in history to create a better world and a better Israel? Or do we leave it up to God?



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- ➔ **The overarching messages of a Modern Orthodox reading of Chazal, of Tanach and of history is that we not only can, but have to, take an active role - as true equal partners with God.**