

From Esther to Netanyahu: A Lesson Stretching 2.5 Millennia

By Rabbi Mayer Freedman

There have been many comparisons drawn between the Purim story that we are in the midst of celebrating and the historical events that are currently playing out on the world stage. In the Purim story, the Jewish nation was faced with an existential threat emanating from the ancient Persian Empire. Today, the Jewish nation is once more facing an existential threat from the modern day Persian Empire, Iran, this time in the form of potential nuclear weapons.



In the Purim story, a Jewish leader, Esther, accepted upon herself to break protocol and appear before the King, unsummoned, in order to plead on behalf of her people. Today, a Jewish leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, broke protocol and appeared in the chambers of the US Congress to plead on behalf of his people.



But there is a glaring contrast between the Purim story that happened long ago and the current events. Benjamin Netanyahu argued that we should not really be sitting down with Iran at the negotiating table at all. Esther, on the other hand, invited the enemy of the Jewish people, Haman, to sit down with her at the same table at a party with Achashveirosh. Why did Esther invite Haman to the party? What was she trying to accomplish?

The Talmud explains that Esther was trying to fool the Jewish people. She knew that they knew that they had a sister in the palace. She was

concerned that they might end up relying on her to save them instead of turning to God. She therefore invited Haman to a private party, attempting to trick the Jews into worrying that she had turned her back on her people and abandoned them. The Jewish nation would therefore feel that they had no alternative and truly pour out their hearts to their Father in Heaven. Esther knew that regardless of whatever political connections she may have had, it was really God who would save the Jewish people. Her plan worked. The Jews returned to their roots and prayed to God. Their heartfelt prayers were answered and the Jewish people triumphed over Haman.

In our times, as well, we must realize that our destiny lies not in the hands of the upper echelons of powerful governments, but rather in the hands of God. Benjamin Netanyahu is a powerful orator and a persuasive debater. But no

matter how cogent he may have been, the real battlefield is in our homes, synagogues, and study halls. Just as in the Purim story, the only way that we can ensure the future of the Jewish people, both spiritually and physically, is by re-embracing our heritage and strengthening our relationship with God and with Judaism. With this, we can ensure that we will once more triumph over the Persian Empire.¹



¹ This is not to say that it was a waste for Benjamin Netanyahu to speak before Congress. It is always our responsibility to put in physical effort. Mordechai encouraged Esther to *risk her life* by appearing unsummoned in front of King Achashveirosh in order to save the Jews. He did not simply say, "Let us pray and it will all work out." With all of the physical effort we put in, however, we must realize that the outcome is dependent upon God's will, not upon our exertions.