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## It's all about the Process

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As having been a teacher's assistant in a special needs school last year as well as teaching children with ADHD this year, I often find myself explaining my educational philosophies to others. One of my strongest beliefs is that children learn best through doing. It is not always about the product, but rather more about the process. This is not to say that the end result isn't important, as it usually is. It's just that as an educator, I strongly emphasize the importance of what can be learned through doing something. When you think about this, it truly makes sense. In life, things are much more meaningful when you put in the hard work to accomplish them. For example, if playing an instrument or being a dancer was easily picked up, we wouldn't appreciate the art of musicians or dancers. Losing weight wouldn't be a popular topic to discuss, whether the conversation is about weight loss strategies, workouts, varying types of exercises, or diets, if the process wasn't so important. Getting a degree in college or graduate school wouldn't be as exciting if you hadn't just spent a number of years in school working towards that degree.

It is so easy to just be good at something and to never have to work at it; but does it make you feel accomplished? What is it that truly makes our accomplishments mean something, if not the effort we put into tasks? This is not to say that the journey we take isn't often taxing or bothersome, but it is usually the more challenging tasks that are the most meaningful. This is why I believe that the process is the exciting part of getting to a product.

This idea of "process" can be applied when thinking about Megillat Esther. We sit through megilla reading twice and listen to this whole drawn out story, which could be written in a more simple and concise way. Here goes... Once upon a time (which is how every good story begins), there was a king, Achashveirosh. He had a mean wife, Vashti, whom he had killed. Now the king needed a new queen and he chose this girl, Esther, who was tight with Mordechai (relationship unclear). There was also this guy, Haman, who hated the Jews and despised Mordechai. Haman made a plan to kill the Jews, but then Esther exposed him. The Jews were saved, and everyone lived happily ever after. The end.

Good story, right? Bet that took less than a minute to read, tops. So, why is the megilla so detailed and complicated? Why are there so many commentaries that tell us details that we wouldn't know just from reading the story? Why are there books like Let My Nation Live by Yosef Deutsch and The Queen You Thought You Knew by Rabbi David Fohrman that change the way we think about the megilla and help us understand the deeper messages within it? To put it simply, it's because of the process. Obviously, everyone is happy that the Jewish people are saved in the end, and that is most definitely an important piece of the story. But now there are so many questions. Why did Achashveirosh have this big party and kill his wife? Why did Esther have to

become the queen? Why did Esther hide information about her heritage? What was Mordechai and Esther's relationship? What was the reason that Mordechai overheard a plot to kill Achashveirosh? Why did Haman hate the Jewish people, and specifically hate Mordechai? Why didn't Mordechai or Esther go straight to Achashveirosh and tell him about Haman's plan?

The questions can go on for forever, but it is these questions that create a more meaningful story. It is these questions that cause one to think about the megilla differently than just reading a short story with no real message. It is the process of the entire megilla that allows us to feel truly victorious at the end of the story. If the megilla was as short and concise as I initially told it, it wouldn't be special. It would be just another story that we'd read once, maybe twice, and never think about again.

Personally, Megillat Esther is one of my favorite seforim in Tanach, so the more I learn about the intricacies and below the surface details, the more connected I feel to it. There is meaning behind every aspect of the Purim story, including the way the holiday begins. We start Purim at the end of a fast day and read the megilla. Then, we spend the rest of that night and the next day rejoicing from the process we read about. Yes, we are celebrating that the Jewish people were saved from Haman's plan to wipe us out. But we are also celebrating the process that Esther and Mordechai went through to save the nation. The story told in the megilla could not have been easy for Esther and Mordechai. It can be assumed that they did not know G-d's ultimate plan, which caused the process they went through to be hard and difficult. Esther and Mordechai did what they needed to do to get results, and therefore, the process in Megillat Esther becomes much more valuable for us to know. It is through understanding the details of the megillah that allow us to create a meaningful connection to the holiday.

In order to see this more clearly, let's look at a couple of examples from the text. One example is when Mordechai has to convince Esther to go talk to Achashveirosh about Haman's plan to kill the Jewish people. Esther is apprehensive because Achashveirosh hasn't summoned her in a while; but what's the big deal? They're husband and wife. Married couples don't ever meet up to talk about the kids or who's going grocery shopping? Well, it is a big deal because of what Esther tells Mordechai: "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, know, that whoever, whether man or woman, shall come to the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is a law for him, that he be put to death, except such to whom, the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live; but I have not been called to the king these thirty days" (4th chapter, verse 11). Esther makes a pretty compelling argument that there is a good chance that she'll be killed if she approaches Achashveirosh without having been summoned. Mordechai responds: "Do not think in your heart that you shall escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if you hold your peace at this time, then relief and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish; and who knows where you have not come to the royal estate for such a time as this?" (4th chapter, verses 13-14).

Okay, so Esther's choices aren't too promising. Either she goes to the king's court without permission and is possibly punished by death or she stays quiet and G-d kills her and her family anyway. What kind of options are these? Esther chooses to hope for the best and approach Achashveirosh. Esther asks the Jewish people to fast and pray for her

for three days before she goes to the king. This sounds like a pretty big deal. Often we need to choose between two options, but usually those options don't result in death. There really wasn't a lesser of two evils in this case. The fact that Esther comes away from her meeting with the king alive is amazing! Esther had to rely on G-d and hope that He would save her, even though she had no way to know the outcome. Would Esther's survival from this have been as special if Esther had had a standing lunch date with her husband everyday? Would it have meant as much if Esther hadn't risked her life for the lives of the hundreds or thousands of Jewish people, who would have been killed from Haman's decree? Would Esther have asked the Jewish people to fast and pray for her if she hadn't truly needed their prayers? Esther needed to go through this process, which made the fact that the king did not have her killed and that she ultimately saved the Jewish people so much more meaningful.

Another example of the idea of "process" is when Esther invites Achashveirosh and Haman to two private parties, in order for her to spill the beans of Haman's plot to wipe out the Jewish people. Why couldn't Esther just tell the king without this pretense of a party? Furthermore, why did there have to be two parties? Also, why couldn't Esther have just called a meeting with the king and Haman? Yosef Deutsch, in his book 'Let My Nation Live,' gives a very interesting explanation, based on Mefarshim, for why Esther went through this whole ordeal. On one hand, by inviting Haman to this private shindig, the king might start to wonder about the relationship of Haman and Esther. Is there something going on between them? Why is Haman, an advisor, being invited to a party with the king? Were Haman and Esther plotting to overthrow him? One party was enough, but to invite Haman to two parties? Esther was planting the seed of doubt in Achashveirosh's mind that would ultimately help her win his favor when she told him about Haman's decree. On the other hand, Haman was elated by these invitations. Esther was clearly living by the phrase "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Esther wanted Haman to feel a sense of false hope, so that in his comfort, he might slip up. He might say or do something that would cause Achashveirosh to be angry. Additionally, Haman's perceived closer connection to the queen caused him, Haman, to be blindsided by Esther's accusation of wanting to kill her and her people. If Haman had caught wind of a private meeting just between the king and queen, he might have gotten suspicious, especially since he was aware that she had a relationship with Mordechai.

Yes, it would have been easier for Esther to just tell Achashveirosh what was going on, but other issues could have arisen. Maybe Achashveirosh would have thought that Esther had a vendetta against Haman. Maybe Achashveirosh would have ignored her. It's possible that the king could have gotten angry with Esther and had her beheaded, just like Vashti. Another variable was Haman. Esther did not trust Haman, so she wanted to keep him close by to monitor his actions. What if Haman had guessed that she was Jewish and went to the king? (Deutsch, 2002, 242-252) Once again, we see the importance of "process."

These are just two examples that show how important process is. Just through analyzing these two parts, the Megilla seems much more meaningful. Megillat Esther is not just merely a story, but it is also full of hidden messages. It teaches us about the importance of going through a process and not just making decisions. We can see how much more special and valuable the product or result can be when the journey is thought-out and deliberate, and even more so when it is difficult.