

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I've always wondered why the holiday of Purim was given the name that it was: the "Pur", in the story of Esther, was simply the name of the lottery used to decide what date Haman would enact his decree. Why would the entire holiday be called after this secondary thought?

Josephine W.

Dear Josephine,

I will answer your question in the classical Jewish way, with a question. When studying the Book of Esther, one is faced by a question. Every book of the Tana"ch, the Jewish Bible, regularly mentions the Name of G-d. How is it that the very book which relates the miracle of the Jews' redemption from the Persian-Median exile doesn't mention the Name of G-d even once?!

One classical commentary, by the Vilna Gaon, answers with the following parable: There once was a King who had only one son. He loved his son, upon whom he showered many gifts. As he grew, so grew his haughtiness, and so grew many of the Court grew to hate him, awaiting the day they could "take care" of him.

One day, the son's haughtiness got the better of him, and he slapped his father the King in the face. At that point the King realized that he must do something drastic. He decided to send him to the dangerous forest for a while, and there he will perhaps repent for his folly. He called his closest aids, and commanded them to protect his son, but they must not reveal themselves to him.

The day the son was sent, those who hated him went after him. He saw someone about to strike him, when suddenly the attacker dropped with an arrow in his back. Breathing a sigh of relief, he wondered who had saved him? After two more attempts at his life, where he was mysteriously rescued, he sat down and began to think. Who possibly could be protecting him? Only his father has that ability, but his father hates him now. Who else could it be? Suddenly it dawned upon him; of course, it was his father! His father's love for him was so great, he's keeping him alive even in his lowest state. His banishment to the forest was only to teach him a lesson. The son's love and admiration for his father grew much greater than all the time he was in the palace. He fully repented, returned and asked forgiveness, and returned home.

The Jews were sent into exile into the dangerous forest, where we are surrounded by our enemies, because we slapped our Father, the King, in the face. Haman issued a decree to destroy us. G-d hid His Face from us, to give us a chance to repent and see His protection, even at our lowest time. That is why the Name of G-d does not appear in the Book of Esther; the story happened in a hidden manner. The Jews, realizing that all these coincidences could not be happening by chance, repented with love. We then were returned to the Palace, to Israel to rebuild the Temple.

The holiday is called "Purim" by name of the "Pur", the lottery, which made it all look as though it's happening by chance. The redemption came by the realization that there is no "chance" in this world. Tonight, Thursday night and Friday, when Jews throughout the world read the Book of Esther, we celebrate the miracle of Jewish eternity, brought about by the Eternal King.