

“AND ESTHER SAID... GATHER ALL THE JEWS ... AND FAST FOR ME ... THREE DAYS...” (ESTHER 4:16)

IN PREPARATION FOR her encounter with Achashveirosh, Esther and the entire Jewish nation fasted and prayed for three days. Esther removed her royal garments and put on sackcloth. She prostrated herself before Hashem and prayed. The Midrash (Esther Rabbah 8:7) relates her prayer: “Hashem ... save your maidservant. I was left an orphan, without a father or mother, destitute, begging from door to door. Now, Hashem, grant success to your impoverished maidservant and rescue Your flock from this enemy ... Father of orphans please stand beside this orphan who trusted in Your compassion.”

Esther recalls the bleak and desolate days of her youth

In the midst of her prayer for the deliverance of her nation, Esther recalls the bleak and desolate days of her youth, as a poor orphan with no one to care for her. She remembers how she trusted in Hashem alone and how He answered her prayers. But why mention this now? The survival of our people was at stake. Of what significance was Esther’s childhood suffering, a personal experience of many years ago, in the face of Haman’s “final solution” that threatens the Jewish nation with total annihilation? Furthermore, she was no longer a poor orphan – she had become the queen of the world’s mightiest empire. Can she truthfully refer to herself now as an “impoverished orphan”?

Esther was not merely remembering her youth. The feelings of loneliness and poverty, with no one to turn to but Hashem, were genuine emotions that she felt right now, even with all her royal splendor. In truth, we are all impoverished orphans, dependent on Hashem’s kindness, as we say in the prayers of the *Yomim Noraim*, “As paupers and beggars we knock on Your door.” Esther utilized the difficulties of her childhood to heighten this feeling within her, by reliving and re-experiencing that close relationship to Hashem and complete reliance on His *chesed*. With this perspective and with these emotions in her heart, she was able to pray to Hashem with greater depth, with total trust in Hashem for the salvation of her people. Had there been in her heart any feeling of security, or trust in flesh and blood, her prayers would not have been the same. Only her feeling of complete abandonment by mankind, with the knowledge that only Hashem will hear her plea, allowed her to reach this profound level of *tefila* – prayer.

Her prayers would not have been the same

We have all experienced times of trouble, the dark hours of illness, or sorrow and loneliness in our lives. At those times, we understood quite clearly that Hashem is really the One who controls our destiny, and we cried out to Him from the depths of our soul. Unfortunately, however, after these moments passed, we lost that feeling of total dependency on Hashem. Somewhere, in the recesses of our minds, we also trust in our financial assets or in other people. Worst of all, we may feel that we don’t need anyone’s help – we trust in our own strength and wisdom. If we follow the example set for us by Queen Esther, we can recall our bleak moments and how we trusted in Hashem alone. We can re-experience the absolute trust in Hashem’s love for us, and pray to Him with all our heart. This *tefila* can merit for us the miraculous salvation that Hashem grants to those who trust in Him, much as He did for our forefathers in Shushan “in those days, in this time.”

After these moments passed, we lost that feeling