Megillah 12.a

***The students of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai asked him: For what** reason **were the enemies of Jewish people,** a euphemism for the Jewish people themselves when exhibiting behavior that is not in their best interests, **in that generation deserving of annihilation? He,** Rabbi Shimon, **said to them: Say** the answer to your question **yourselves. They said to him: It is because they partook with pleasure of the feast of that wicked one,** Ahasuerus, and they partook there of forbidden foods. Rabbi Shimon responded: **If so, those in Shushan should have been killed** as punishment, but **those in the rest of the world,** who did not participate in the feast, **should not have been killed. They said to him:** Then **you say** your response to our question. **He said to them: It is because they prostrated before the idol** that Nebuchadnezzar had made, as is recorded that the entire world bowed down before it, except for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.*

אָמְרוּ לוֹ: וְכִי מַשּׂוֹא פָּנִים יֵשׁ בַּדָּבָר? אָמַר לָהֶם: הֵם לֹא עָשׂוּ אֶלָּא לִפְנִים — אַף הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לֹא עָשָׂה עִמָּהֶן אֶלָּא לִפְנִים. וְהַיְינוּ דִּכְתִיב: ״כִּי לֹא עִנָּה מִלִּבּוֹ״.

***They said to him:** But if it is true that they worshipped idols and therefore deserved to be destroyed, why was a miracle performed on their behalf? **Is there favoritism** expressed by God **here? He said to them: They did not** really worship the idol, but pretended to **do** so **only for appearance,** acting as if they were carrying out the king's command to bow before the idol. **So too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not** destroy them but **did** act angry **with them only for appearance.** He too merely pretended to desire to destroy them, as all He did was issue a threat, but in the end the decree was annulled. **And this is as it is written: "For He does not afflict from His heart** willingly" (Lamentations 3:33), but only for appearances' sake.*

How could one night of "harmless" royal pleasure explode into a decree that nearly erased an entire nation from history?

Let's unpack some questions.
The sin of enjoying the feast of the evil king, **seems to be** that they ate forbidden foods, as indeed the midrash tells us, "The nation of Israel became endangered by eating non jewish foods."
And the question that is asked is the well known question : is eating forbidden foods so severe that because of it a nation should be deserving of being wiped out G-d forbid.

Note that in the talmud the only question around eating forbidden food that is asked is " why would the whole of Jewry be punished if only the Jews of shushan ate this food?" as though there is acceptance that those who ate should be deserving of annihilation G-d forbid.

Also take note that the langauge used in the talmud is " they enjoyed the food of that wicked man", and so it seems that the sin wasnt the eating but the <u>enjoying</u>.

But heres the problem, if the menu was glatt-kosher and the wine list perfectly supervised, then what exactly were we "tasting" that almost got us killed?

It also seems a bit of a stretch to suggest that the problem was that they actually did eat forbidden foods, because in describing the feast, our sages teach that the menu was tailored so that it was "kirtzon ish va'ish" - to suit every man's desire, meaning to suit both Mordechai and haman. So there was obviously kosher food.
The midrash also teaches that when we read in the megillah that " the no one was forced to drink " it means that no one was forced to drink forbidden wine. So the feast included kosher foods and kosher wine
And if perhaps the Talmud is telling us that though they had options the jewish people ate forbidden foods, wouldn't this information be revealed and obvious?

There are commentaries who say that Achashverosh was celebrating as per his calculations, that the full 70 years had passed of the babylonian exile and no one came to redeem the Jews and they were not rebuilding the temple, so he declared a feast to celebrate this.

At the feast he displayed the vessels of the temple that had been taken into captivity with the Jews, and anyone who participated in that feast was thereby indicating his own joy with the destruction of the temple.

Even children?

But this too as an explanation for the harsh decree is hard to understand. Because the reality was that Haman wanted to heaven forbid annihilate the entire jewish nation, including children, who were not yet held responsible for their actions and could therefore not be punished for their actions.
The megillah tells us very specifically that Haman's decree was upon the entire jewish people. Young to old, children and women.
And in that case, if they were deserving of annihilation because they bowed to the idol, as the talmud suggests, perhaps then it can be understood because our sages do teach that when our nation engaged in idol worship, like what which took place at the sin of the golden calf, G-d said he was going to annihilate the entire nation in one go.
But if that wasn't the answer to what brought on the evil decree then
how can we say that because they participated in the feast and it appeared as though they were rejoicing over the destruction of the temple, every single jew should be wiped out, including children who had nothing to do with this?

How one shepherd can protect one lamb, from 70 wolves.

Our sages teach that " the nation of Israel is compared to a single lamb who stands in the midst of 70 wolves, and great is the shepherd, meaning G-d who saves and guards the flock.

In other words, our living surrounded by the nations of the world is often a miraculous existence that transcends the laws of nature, like a lamb who is surrounded by 70 wolves and she survives. By nature there is no way that she can survive that situation, but by G-ds kindness - the greatness of the shepherd, He saves them and guards them in a most miraculous way - that is beyond nature.

But it doesnt always feel this way. Why*?*

However, this is the situation when our people are guarded with a special potection and the 70 wolves cannot touch them, when our behaviour is such that we depend on G-d to save us and guard us.

But if we behave in a way that negates this guardianship - when we consider the 70 wolves and their power as consequential and the actions they take as consequential in our lives, we remove ourselves G-d forbid from that miraculous guardianship and we place ourselves in the path of natural law.

Maimonidies explains this when he writes that the verse "v'histarti panai mehem.." I will hide my face from them and bad things will encounter us, as because G-d is not in my midst these bad things have found me ".
As though these things found him by mere happenstance.
Because when a person separates himself from G-d, Hashem is separated from him and he is vulnerable to all kinds of bad things that may encounter him.
In other words his personal divine providence is removed and he is unprotected. And now abandoned and vulnerable to all negative possibilities.

And this is likely what maimoniies intends, when he teaches, if my nation walks with me with indifference <u>then I will be there</u>, with indifference.
In other words, if I G-d, bring a difficulty upon you so that you will awaken to repentance, and you say it's just a natural event, this is the way the world works and don't recognize my presence in this, then G-ds response isn't just allowing for that negative event to occur, but it will appear as thought G-d is completely disengaged with us and as though divine providence has gone from our midst - leaving us open to G-d forbid happenstance.

According to this we can understand why " enjoying the feast of that rashah achashveirosh" caused this decree of annihilation, because this decree wasn't a punishment aligned with the sin, it was a natural result of their behaviour.
Heres what this looked like. When achashveros became king and appointed haman as cheif minister, we were the lamb sorrounded by 70 wolves. And because we felt that we were at the mercy of achashveirosh - and remember, the feast was a good few years before Haman was appointed to this position, we left ourselves vulnerable and ate from the feast, and our miraculous protection from the great shepherd was denied us.

Because the fact that they ate from the feast of that wicked achasveirosh, who invited them to the feast, was indication that his position as king was very important to them. They saw participating in the feast as a great honour so much so that they enjoyed being there.

This was not enforced upon them, due to the achashverosh being the ruler and therefor they needed to show up, No, they showed up and enjoyed the feast just because they were invited.
And because they considered the wolves important and enjoyed the honor that they were receiving from that evil man, they were rejecting the miraculous protection of the great shepherd, G-ds protection, and placing themselves under the natural rule of of the wolves who reject and threaten the existance of this lamb.

Are we really meant to navigate a physical world with only spiritual tools?

Let's understand this better.
We know that our sages teach that one should <u>not</u> <u>rely on a miracle.</u>
The torah teaches " G-d will bless you in all that you do " - you must make a vessel for blessing
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So while ultimately it is G-ds blessing that will make one wealthy, nevertheless, if one sits idle then that blessing will not come to rest upon him, it demands that one does something to acquire parnassah - one must do to receive the blessing.

On the other hand, one must know and recognize that it isn't his efforts, but the making of the vessel that brings the success.
It isnt really the great effort that us the reason and the cause for one's financial successs, these are only a vessel for G-ds blessing, into which G-d pours his sustenance and his income
So **G-d** wants a persons parnassah to be enclothed and to come through a natural vessel, and through natural means.
This is the system that G-d established in this world - a natural order. Therefore man is instructed to create natural means for an income, but the blessing of sustenance is actually G-ds blessing.

And once that is established for someone, he will not think that that his success has come through his business, because he is aware that all that he has done is make a vessel within which G-ds blessing can flow, ones real efforts have to be about turning him or herself into a vessel worthy of G-ds blessing.

Looking at this in greater depth yet, the fact that it is G-ds blessing that makes one wealthy, isnt just because man's sustenance, that comes through his natural efforts, depends fully and only on he who determines nature - on G-d, there's more.
And the more is the main point. The Jewish people are not governed by nature. As we have explained in several places, our nation receives our life sustenance and force from a place that is beyond nature, because G-d guides and leads every aspect of a Jews life, with a special guidance and with miraculous means which are not limited by the rules of nature.

Accordingly, in order to receive Hashems blessing man must indeed invest - he must act, but that is only becuase G-d wants this miraculous guidance to pass through nature, and therefor G-d clothed miracles in nature, so that this looks like one does their part naturally, invests naturally.

But it is only an external garment for the flow that will come from above. From G-d who transcends the nature he created, and not from nature itself.

One who looks at his efforts and lacks this perspective and the knowledge that it is G-ds blessing that brings one success and wealth, is comparable to a person who puts great effort into sewing pockets into a garment to fill them with money, or who sews wallets to carry money but doesn't do anything to make that money.

This disucssion helps us understand the situation of our people in the days of Achashveirosh.
When our nation is in exile under the dominian of the nations of the world, honor must be given to the governing bodies and the rule of the land should also be considerd rule for the Jew. Our sages in ethics of our fathers teach that " we are to pray for the wellfare of a government and seek its wholeness."
Therefor when Achashveirosh invited the Jews to a feast they had to participate - obviously from what was permissable to them.
But alongside this, there needed to be perspective, a feeling and a clear recognition that our existence as a people does not depend at all on Achashveirosh G-d forbid. Even though at the time of his reign he was an autocratic ruler who ruled the entire discovered world.

Our existance is only in the hands of G-d. Beyond that even, the existance of our people is a miracle enclothed in natre and sometimes its a real obvous miracle - like the survival of the one lamb surrounded by 70 wolves - who has a great shepherd who guards it - who guards us, our nation of Israel, with miracles that transcend nature.

This then is the internal message in the words that "our sin was that we enjoyed the feast of that wicked achashveirosh. "
Their participation in the feast, wasnt because they were showing respect for the king, it was because they really though of achashveirosh as some supreme ruler, to the point that they made a serious mistake in thinking that their very existence depended on his kindness - on his capriciousness! On the kindness of a man whose life was the complete the opposite of what G-d wants in this world.
And because of this misguided thinking they arrived at the feast and they enjoyed it.

According to everything we have just said, about the catagory of the sin of our nation in the time of the decree of haman, we can get a better understanding also, of the way in which this unique miracle of salvation took place in the days of purim.
Which is different to the miracle of chanukah and certainly different to the redemption from Egypt.
The salvation in the days of the chanuka miracle occured in an obviously miraculous way. The miracles clearly defied nature - where the many- the mighty greak army, were dilivered into the hands of the few and the weak, the small army of macabees, while the salvation of purim came through a miracle enclothed in nature - there was nothing that the human eye could see that appeared to be out of a natural order of events.

This was aligned with the cause of the decree to begin with. As a people we denigrated ourselves to the laws of nature, giving importance to a wicked king - not honour as is required but confering upon him a status that was not aligned with what a Jew must know, and enjoying the feast of that wicked man.

A miracle enclothed in nature teaches us that the miraculous governance from above is not limited to the realm beyond nature. It doesn't need to break the boundaries of nature, but can appear enclothed in the garments of nature itself.

The uniqueness of the Purim miracle - a miracle enclothed in nature - Jewish girl becomes queen, saves her people, Haman makes some strategic mistakes, Achashveiroshes capriciousness etc. is that it is a complete and obvious miracle, which is why we make the blessing " who has made miracles for our forefathers - in those days at this time" both for the chanukah miracle which wasn't enclothed in nature at all and for the miracle of Purim - which was.
Because our salvation on Purim wasnt natural in any way, it was purely miraculous.
 Which is why when we look at how the events of the miracle of purim unfolded, we can see that there were clear miracles and yet it was all enclothed in nature - because even what looks like the nature of a Jew is enclothed in miracles that transcend nature.

These two perspectives, on the one hand - that we do not depend on miracles and are required to do everything within nature, and on the other simultaneously to recognize that all the natural events of ones life is only a garment and that everything that happens in a Jewish life is of a miraculous order from above, is how Esther expresses herself in accepting the task to save her nation.
We see that Esther on one hand goes to Achashveirosh, to carry out the task that Mordechai has given her, to beg on behalf of her nation, and for this task she needs to find favor in his eyes. Particularly as
a. She hasnt been called into his presence for 30 days, and
b. She was arriving to his inner court without having been summoned by him and that was litterally putting her life in danger. Becaue that would normally call for ones immediate death.

So she defintiely needed some way to find favor in his eyes.
But alongside this reality, she fasted for three days and nights - day and night, which would naturally render her weak looking and wan - the opposite of showing up looking like someone achashveirosh might be interested in granting favor to.

So if we look at this closely, why didnt she just pick a side. If she was going to acheive salvation for her nation, and this required natural efforts, how could she weaken her possiblities by fasting and showing up looking anything but attractive.
On the other hand, if she depends on the salvation to be miraculous, and her efforts would be succesfull only through prayer to G-d and fasting and repentance, why did she put herself into such a state of danger and go to the king?
But according to what weve discussed we can now understand that it was specifically throughboth of these paradigms, the sin of enjoying this wicked achashveiroshes feast could be repaired and rectified.

The basis of the mistake that caused them to actually enjoy the feast of this evil man, and not just attend out of respect, was because they thought that if they are going to need help in the natural order of things, they govenrning body and the rules that govern their lives are the rules of the kingdom. They attributed control to Achashverosh over their physcial lives.
Esthers actions made evident to the nation that going to Achashverosh - using natural channels is but a garment for the salvation that will come from above. In a miraculous way.
And first whats needed is prayer, and fasting - in other words teshuva, to be worthy of this miracle, but since G-d wants for the miracle from above to have some purchase in the garments of this world - in natural events, Mordechai sharing with her divine instruction told her to go to Achashverosh even though there was danger involved.

Which tells us not to look at the garment and think it so significant - it only looks like a means and it even presents with danger, but all it is is a garment and a means to a great miracle and to great salvation.

One of the lessons to b learned from this in our personal divine service is, that a Jew is created a soul in a body, which demands that we involve ourselves in physical things. And because we were created this way, this was obvsiouly certainly G-ds will, that we engage in the physical.

But the instruction that we receive from Purim is that though we need to be engaged with the physica, it shouldnt be with pleasure - because the fact that we are engaged with the physcial is just a garment and its secondary to the main point which is our purpose in this world.

Which is the pleasure that a Jew must have in his spiritual existance - in the existance of his soul, in the study of torah and the observance of mitzvos. Being involved in the physical is really only to be a healthy functioning individual who can serve G-d.

To properly fulfill this mandate as a Jew, notice what you live for.
Is it for the sake of your spirituality, that even having a healthy body is for the sake of being able to properly serve G-d, so that your real pleasure in life comes from something you studied and a mitzvah that you did and the body is something to be looked after because that's what makes all this possible.
Or are you making the physcial primary, and asking questions about mitzvos like “whats the bare minimum I have to do so that its cosidered like I fulfilled my obligation here? Is there more pleasure in the physical stuff and lots more attention paid to that?

Thats the lesson from the days of the purim miracle. The entire story of salvation is connected to this. The realization that the jewish nation had that their pleasure in participating in the kings feast went against the very essence of Jewish existance, and that realization merited their salvation.