

PURIM INSIGHTS



FROM
THE MEANINGFUL
LIFE CENTER

INSPIRING KERNELS
BY RABBI SIMON JACOBSON

WHAT IS PURIM

SALVATION

Purim is a holiday on which we celebrate our salvation from an evil plot aimed at our total annihilation, and our *wholehearted* acceptance of the precepts of the Torah. Salvation and total commitment – these are two central themes of Purim.

TRANSFORMATION

Purim, however, is not just about salvation. Even more, it is a celebration of transformation – a holiday when grief is transformed into joy, mourning into celebration and darkness to light.

TRANSCENDENCE

Purim is a holiday when a window opens up that allows us to reach deep inside of ourselves. It is a day of joyous abandon that transcends conventional boundaries.

PURIM = LOTS

“Lot” symbolizes a level that transcends logic and all the distinctions between darkness and light. On Purim we are able to reach this dimension, allowing us to transform darkness into light, and grief into joy.

YOM KI-PURIM

In some ways Purim is greater even than Yom Kippur: On Purim we can reach a state of transcendence by eating and drinking – a feat possible on Yom Kippur only through fasting.



CUSTOMS

MEGILLAH

The keystone of the Purim celebration is the reading (on the evening and morning of the holiday) of the Book of Esther – better known as the *Megillah* – which recounts the amazing events in Persia in the 4th Century BCE.

SEUDAH

To help us bring out our natural, inner joy, we eat a festive meal with l'chaim. The joy of the day itself compels us to reach a level of profound depth where we no longer distinguish between cursing Haman and blessing Mordechai.

MISHLOACH MANOS / MATANOS L'EVYANIM

The sending of baskets of food to friends as well as giving money to the poor are important mitzvos of the holiday. It underscores our unity as a people and our love for each other as was modeled by the Jews of the Persian Empire and related in the Megillah.

COSTUMES

Because Purim is considered an upside down holiday – since nothing in the Book of Esther is as it seems to be, and every plot twist is reversed – it is customary to don costumes and masks on the holiday.

WHO'S WHO IN THE MEGILLAH

As is true of all the people we are introduced to in the Torah, the characters that populate the Book of Esther are archetypes, representing an energy present in the divine cosmic order.

ACHASHVEROSH: THE KING

In the cosmic order, as the king, Achashverosh represents the top. He operates on the level where holiness and unholiness are one, therefore the flow of his energy can go either to the evil Haman or to the goodly Mordechai. Achashverosh represents our daily struggles between good and evil, between divinity and immorality.

HAMAN: THE EVIL ADVISOR

Kabbalistically, Haman represents the *keter* of *kelipah*, the “crown of the source of negative energy.” He is identified with “harsh restraint,” which corresponds to the “characteristic of judgment.” As such he embodies the prosecutor of the Jewish people. On the level of the psyche, he embodies arrogance and self-worship.

MORDECHAI: THE GREAT SAGE AND LEADER OF THE JEWS

In the cosmic order, Mordechai represents the channel of wisdom. A mnemonic rewording of his name yields *mira dachya* (“pure myrrh”) the first of the fragrant spices used in the Temple incense. On the level of psyche, he is the epitome of humility and unwavering faith.

ESTHER: THE BELOVED QUEEN

In the cosmic order, Esther represents the channel of royalty. On the level of psyche, she is the divine feminine, the implementer, doing what her counterpart (Mordechai) advises and carrying his wise and holy instructions into the dark places of the king's palace.





WHAT'S WHAT IN THE MEGILLAH

The inner/personal applications of some of the Megillah narrative:

"Mordechai would not kneel or bow" (Esther 3:2)

This is the secret of Jewish survival through the ages: We worship only G-d, not any man or man-made entity.

HAMAN'S PROPHETIC WORDS TO ACHASHVEROSH: "There is one nation spread and scattered across all other nations, and their faith is different from all nations" (3:8)

The secret to Jewish perpetuity is to be "one nation" – unity – even as we are spread and scattered across the world. Thus the Jewish response was, "Go gather all the Jews" (4:16). We therefore commemorate Purim through unity – sending food presents to friends and gifts to the poor. Jewish unity leads to redemption.

“Relief and salvation will come to the Jews from another source, and you and the house of your father will be lost” (4:14)

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch once told his father, Rabbi Shalom DovBer, that he had done someone a favor. “You are mistaken,” said Rabbi Shalom DovBer, “you did yourself a favor, not your fellow. Your fellow was done a favor by the Almighty, Who made use of one of His many agents. Relief and salvation will come if not from you then from another source, but ‘you,’ which according to Kabbalah refers to the soul, and the house of your father, the source of the soul, will have lost out on the opportunity to be an agent of the Holy One.”

“That night the King’s sleep was disturbed” (6:1)

(The *Megillah* reader raises his voice from this section on, because this is the beginning of the miracle.) Night is *galut*, a spiritual state of darkness, when the flow of divine energy into our world seems diminished and distorted. G-d seems remote and disaffected; the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper. Yet, “even as I sleep my heart is awake.” The king’s insomnia is the light beginning to emerge from the darkness. In the first five chapters of the *Megillah* the Divine was “asleep”. But on “that night” the sleep of the King of the universe was disturbed. The soul began to waken, and then G-d’s Providence over His nation began to manifest itself.

“La’yehudom hoysoh oreh v’simcha v’soson v’yekar” (8:16)

For the Jews there was light, happiness, joy and honor. The symbolism of these four things: “Light” refers to Torah, “happiness” to the festivals, “joy” to circumcision, and “prestige” to Tefillin. Haman had prohibited observing these four mitzvot, and now that he was gone the Jews were again able to perform them. (Talmud, *Megillah* 16b)

Wishing you a

HAPPY PURIM

from the
Meaningful
Life Center.

