

Toward a Meaningful Purim PURIM INSIGHTS

37 Inspiring Kernels

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EXCLUSIVE FOR RABBIS

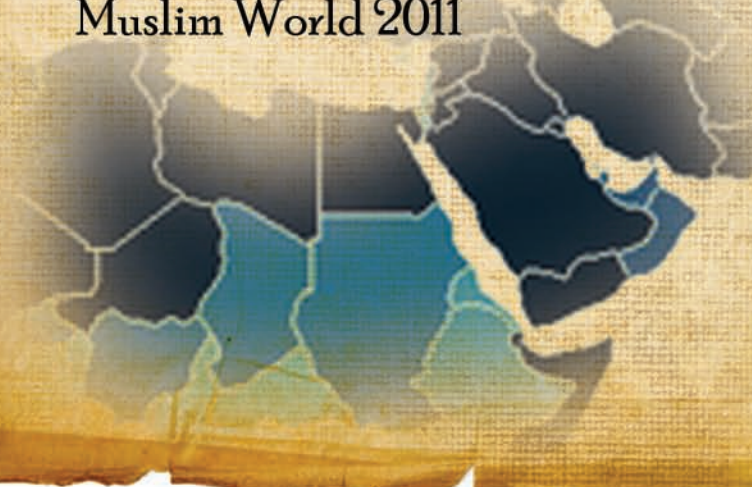
PURIM THEN AND NOW



Persian Empire
356 BCE

"Now it came to pass in the days of Achashverosh -he was the Achashverosh who reigned from Hodu (India) to Cush (Ethiopia), one hundred twenty-seven provinces" (Opening of Megillah)

Arab/
Muslim World 2011



2367 YEARS APART -
BUT THE SAME STORY

Retracing Steps
Connecting Dots
Making Sense of
Events Today

PURIM INSIGHTS

These short insights and vignettes contain kernels of inspirational material, which can easily be used and interspersed throughout your Purim activities and festivities: Before or after the Megillah reading, at the Purim feast, or any other time you see fit.

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I. WHAT IS PURIM?

1. Salvation

Purim is a rabbinically-ordained 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 given some 700 years earlier at Mount Sinai.

Salvation and total commitment - these are two central themes of Purim: a) No matter how harsh the circumstances, we can be redeemed in an instant. An example of this instant change is evident today in the Middle East: Just a few months ago who would have believed that such dramatic change could come to an entire repressed region - change that is bound to revolutionize billions of lives. b) But times of crisis bring out the best in us. The terrible decree calling for the

destruction of the entire Jewish race, elicited the total commitment of the people to accept the Torah completely and entirely.

2. 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. Purim (and the month of Adar) is a day (and month) of extreme joy. Purim teaches that it is not enough to vanquish the enemy (and get back to a neutral state); we must also redeem the experience by turning the pain into a catalyst for growth.

3. 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. We are told to celebrate *ad de lo yado* - which means to be joyous until we reach a place beyond the doors of perception, a place that transcends dark and light, even the pains and disappointments of our lives.

4. Purim = Lots

The name of the holiday Purim is so called because Haman threw lots to determine the day of his decree to annihilate the Jewish people. But there is a deeper significance to this name - which explains why we call the holiday “Lots:”

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

5. Yom Ki-Purim

In Hebrew, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, is known as *Yom HaKipurim*. Ki-Purim means like Purim (Tikkunei Zohar 21). Because in some ways Purim is greater even than Yom Kippur (when “lots” are also thrown): On Purim we can reach a state of utter transcendence (“lots”) by eating and drinking - a feat possible on Yom Kippur only through fasting and abstaining from material food and drink!

II. CUSTOMS

6. 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. The reading of the *Megillah* is accompanied by much ruckus whenever Haman, the man responsible for the evil plot, is mentioned ... in order to blot out his name and his memory.

7. Seudah

To help us bring out our natural, inner joy, we eat a festive meal with *l'chaim*. Indeed, it is an obligation to get so drunk on Purim until we don't know the difference between "blessed be Mordechai (the hero of the story)" and "cursed be Mordechai (its villain)."¹

For, on Purim, we are empowered to turn liabilities into assets, to transform the most negative concealments into a force for good ... to make cursing Haman as positive as blessing Mordechai.

8. 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*:

When the Jews realized they had been delivered from their antagonists, and the month had been transformed for them

*from one of anguish to one of joy, from one of grief to days of celebration ... and feasting and rejoicing, they sent gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor ... These days shall be recalled and observed in every generation, by every family, in every colony and every city, and these Purim days shall never pass from among the Jews nor their memory depart from their descendants.*²

9. 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. Children particularly enjoy this feature as they deliver the treats instead of demanding them, for Purim is a day of sharing, caring and helping one another.

III. PURIM LESSONS

10. Divine Hand

One of the most striking elements of the Megillah is not an event, but a non-event: G-d's name is never mentioned in the entire book! Not once. The primary reason for this is because in the Purim miracle G-d, the Divine Choreographer, remains behind the scenes, even as He orchestrates a series of events, which may appear random to us, when in fact they are frames of a larger drama unfolding. It's up to us to recognize the underlying patterns in the ostensibly random events that lead up to the miraculous conclusion.

The same is true of our lives today: On a surface level we cannot see the Hand of G--d that directs our lives. It behooves us to look closer and discern the Divine providence that connects the seemingly random events of our daily encounters and interactions. All our experiences are means that lead us to a higher place.

11. Connecting the Dots

The amazing part of the Purim story is its unobtrusiveness. The entire story from beginning to end takes place in a period of nine years, resulting from events that to the naked eye could have appeared entirely random and circumstantial. Persian King Achashverosh

happens to throw a party. When he invites his wife she happens to rebuff him, and in his anger he has her killed. Esther, who is secretly Jewish, happens to be chosen to become the new queen. A while later Mordechai happens to overhear and foil an assassination attempt against the king. One night years later the king happens to have insomnia, and he happens to be read the story of Mordechai saving his life. He then happens to suddenly reward Mordechai. When Haman is ready to fulfill his evil plot, Esther happens to be there to thwart it.

Long story short - over a period of nearly a decade, circumstances are positioned in such a way where all the right people are in the right place and the right time to ensure that Haman does not exterminate the Jewish people!

If we were living then, all these events - spread over 9 years - could have appeared as random, isolated experiences. When you are too close to the events you can sometimes not see the forest for the trees. But in retrospect, when we read the Megillah on Purim and we hear the sequence of events, we then can connect the dots and see the greater picture emerging - one that leads to an absolute miracle.

Purim teaches us to search for the patterns amongst the dots of our time. And when we see them, the nearly 2400 years since Purim originally took place is not a wide span that separates then and now. Indeed, all these years - the past and the present - become one continuum. Purim is an event that lives on today.

12. Insomnia

Many important events mark our lives. But what value or significance would you attribute to a trivial experience, like, say, a case of insomnia?

The great codifier of Jewish law, known as the Maharil³ writes, that the *Megillah* reader raises his voice when he reads the words “that night the king’s sleep was disturbed,” because the primary Purim miracle begins at this point.

Due to his insomnia, the king ordered that the book of the kingdom’s chronicles, which recorded the history of his reign, be brought and read to him. The story that was read was how Mordechai had saved the king’s life from an assassination attempt. This evoked the king’s desire to reward Mordechai, and this, in turn, began a series of events which led to the Purim miracle with the entire Jewish nation rescued from annihilation.

13. What You See is Not What You Get

This chain reaction reflects one of the most powerful themes of Purim - what you see is not what you get. On the surface level, the king’s restless night would be dismissed as trivial. In truth, it turns out that it becomes a critical juncture that changes the course of history!

The Purim story - and the story behind the story - teaches us how to look at our lives in a completely new and revolutionary way.

Purim is the story of our lives. Our lives, just like the Purim narrative, is driven by a hidden script, which is hard to recognize at the time, but in retrospect patterns emerge as we discover the underlying narrative that leads to salvation. A bigger picture takes shape from the connecting dots of seemingly disconnected events, including the smallest details that we may completely ignore and disregard due to their triviality.

Imagine: A man can’t fall asleep and the destiny of a people is changed forever! How many other quirky details in existence are affecting our very lives as we speak?

So the next time you cannot sleep - or experience something else seemingly trivial - you never know ... it may be the beginning of your salvation.

14. Joy on Demand / “Ad De Lo Yado”

Purim is a holiday of joy, but how can we feel joy in our lives when we are not in the mood or have many reasons not to be joyful?

The answer of the Torah is that joy is natural and inherent to every person. Just witness the natural happiness and cheerfulness of a young child. Children begin to lose their natural cheer only due to external causes. Their inherent joy starts to erode when they begin to experience the disappointments and tragedies of life events, and the despondent attitudes of parents, educators and other adults.

How do we access the inner joy innate in each of us? By accessing the cheer and enthusiasm of our inner child - the part of us connected to G-d that precedes the sadness that life circumstances imposed (and continue to impose) upon us. That is what Purim is all about: the celebration of our inner child, the celebration of the enchantment and the magic of our souls.

Purim, a day when a window opens up that allows us deep inside of ourselves, is a day of joyous abandon that transcends conventional boundaries. We are told to celebrate *ad de lo yado* - which means to be joyous until we reach a place beyond the doors of perception, a place where we

transcend dark and light, even the pains and disappointments of our lives.

To carry the joy of the day into the weeks and months that follow, we need to cultivate our inner soul child by meditating and internalizing the feeling that G-d put us on earth for a unique purpose ... that we have an indispensable contribution to make. Realizing that all else in life pales in comparison to the essential power of our soul is a sure cause for being joyous.

So ...

On Purim day listen to the *Megillah*, participate in a Purim festive meal, send gifts of food to friends, and give charity to the needy. These are all methods and tools to excavate the inner resources of your soul child that are available on Purim.

Joy is contagious. Often when you can't access it on our own, a way of igniting it is by celebrating in dance and song with others. Behavioral change, acting joyous (even when you don't feel like it) is a way of bringing out the deep reservoirs of joy inside you.

Happy Purim!

15. Living with the Times

The Talmud says: “One who reads the *Megillah* backwards has not fulfilled the mitzvah.”⁴

Why would anyone want to read the story backwards?! Explains the Baal Shem Tov:

Anyone who reads the Purim narrative as if it happened “back when” in the past (in effect, reading the story backwards, with the end being closer to us than the beginning), has not fulfilled the mitzvah, which demands of us to read and see the story as if it is unfolding and playing itself out today.

16. The Mysterious Achashverosh: Hero or Villan?

King Achashverosh is perhaps the most intriguing, and definitely the most mysterious, character in the *Megillah*.

Mordechai and Esther are the obvious heroes here, and they came out triumphant at the end. Haman and his cronies are the obvious villains, and they are humiliated and hanged at the end. But what about Achashverosh - what are we to make of him?

Initially, he went along with Haman’s plot to annihilate all the Jews. But then, Esther convinced him to direct his wrath at Haman. And so, instead of Purim being a day of tragedy for the Jews, it became -

at Achashverosh’s behest - a day of celebration.

What’s with this Achashverosh? Was he a hero, a villain, or just an idiot who couldn’t make up his mind?

To understand Achashverosh’s conflicted psyche we need to probe into the deeper story of Purim and trace it back to its roots.

17. Consummation and completion of Mattan Torah at Sinai — “They fulfilled what they received...”

The story of Purim actually began about one-thousand years earlier, when the Jews accepted the Torah. Until Sinai a schism existed between “above” and “below.” But Sinai infused us with the power to integrate the two. Transforming the material universe into spiritual energy is a partnership - a symbiotic relationship between the Divine and the human. Such a partnership requires not just Divine revelation, but complete human cooperation and acceptance. Thus the need for Purim.

On Purim, the people, on their own initiative - with no hint of being overwhelmed by the presence of G-d - embraced the divine mandate, thereby consummating the Sinai covenant that they made nearly ten centuries earlier.

However, the story of Purim doesn't end there, for even if the Jewish people accepted the divine mandate, the rest of the world did not. And there is no way to transform the physical universe into a "divine home" if all the nations on earth are not part of the process.

Purim, therefore, came to influence all the nations, as the Book of Esther states:

And all the ministers of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's functionaries honored the Jews, beginning with their leader, King Achashverosh.⁵

Yet, despite the happy ending, deep tensions still remained. Purim provided a respite, but much work still remained to bridge the dichotomy between the divine plan and the selfish world. Indeed, the harshest times were still to come.

Achashverosh, the dominant leader of his time, reflected this duality in his own personality - one side of him gravitated toward Haman and genocide, the other toward benevolence in his support of Mordechai and Esther.

What Purim achieved, however, was not a temporary reprieve; it had a perpetual effect on all of history - empowering the nations of the world to tame their "Haman-like" tendencies and reveal their "divine" personalities.

This is the essence of the Purim celebration: "The Jews established and accepted

upon themselves and upon their descendants" to annually celebrate Purim and to "commemorate and celebrate these days in every generation, by every family, in every province and every city. And these days of Purim will never pass from among the Jews nor shall their memory depart from their descendants."⁶

18. What Role Do You Play?

The stories we tell each other - whether in fairy tales, novels, on the screen - all have the same format. They almost always have three acts. Act One: something happens to set the action in motion and to introduce the hero and villain in the drama. Act Two: the hero is challenged by the villain or by evil circumstances which the villain exploits. Act Three: The hero wins, the villain loses, and we the reader/viewer walk away happy and satisfied.⁷

Why is it that our stories uniformly adopt this format?

Because this is the story of history. Whatever religion we follow, or even if we follow none, we sense in our innermost being that this is how things are meant to be. Life is full of challenge, but there is bound to be a happy ending after all is said and done, because good is meant to triumph over evil.

See, G-d has a plan, and we are the players in His drama. We are not puppets by any means. We freely choose the role we will play: Will we be the hero? The villain? The victim? The bystander? The role we play is our choice. But *it is* a three act play. The script has already been written. There will be a challenge, there will be a struggle, but there will also be a happy ending. The only question is - and this is totally up to us - where do we fit in?

Just see how this plays out in the Book of Esther:

The King of Persia, the fickle-minded Achashverosh has killed his wife, Vashti, and he is in the market for a new one. All the maidens in the kingdom are vetted, and lo and behold, who is selected for the royal harem? Esther, a beautiful girl, who is secretly Jewish.

A Jewish girl becomes the queen just when the evil minister Haman convinces the king to annihilate the Jewish people, and a royal decree is issued to that effect.

Esther's uncle, the good Mordechai, learns of the plot and sends a message to Esther in palace telling her (in short): "The Jewish people, your people, are about to be killed. All of them. You have to save them."⁸

Esther - who is about to decide whether she will be the heroine or just a bystander - is willing, but she only sees obstacles

ahead. She writes back: "I can't! If I go to the king without being invited, I could be killed!"⁹

In response, Mordechai sends her the most bizarre message which completely convinces her to risk her life. Mordechai says, "Esther, if you don't do this, *somebody else* will, and you will be left out of the loop."

Why is Esther so quickly convinced by this bizarre message? Because she knows that the story of history is a three-act play. She knows this is where she is challenged and gets to choose her role. And Esther does not want to be a bystander who might or might not make it. Esther wants to be the heroine of the story. And, as we all well know, she is. And, as we all well know, there is a happy ending.

And this is the message to us all. The world is progressing all the time to enlightenment, to refinement, to redemption. Do we want to *actively* participate in this process or not? Oh, we are participating, whether we know it or not, whether we want to or not! But are we active players or mere bystanders? Are we the stars (or at least the supporting stars) of the show, or just extras propping up the scenery on the set? The world will see its happy ending. What part do we choose to play in bringing about the final redemption?¹⁰

19. Living in Peace

We have been given a divine blueprint for life - a universal mandate for all human beings how to live our lives in the noblest way possible. Abraham, “father of many nations,” taught his children how to live up to this calling and how to co-exist in total peace with their brothers and neighbors. How to balance passionate faith in a material world.

Abraham’s children included: Ishmael (the progenitor Arab/Muslim people) and Isaac, the father of: Esau (also known as Edom, the progenitor of the Western/Christian world), and Jacob (also known as Israel, the progenitor of the Jews).

It took centuries for the nations of the world to embrace this blueprint and

integrate it into their institutions. For two millennia, the nations have gone through their “growing pains” and killed millions of Jews and others in the process.

Now, some 3300 years from Sinai and nearly 2400 years from Purim, we are obliged to declare that the calling of our time is to finish the process. We are meant to empower each other, so that all peoples of the world - the children of Esau, and - what is most relevant today - the children of Ishmael as well as all their brothers, sisters and cousins all over the world - will embrace, once and for all, the divine teachings of Abraham, the common father we all share.

IV. PURIM THEN & NOW

20. Parallels

The parallels between events today and the ones that happened during the first Purim are outstanding and uncanny. The upheavals in the Middle East today are taking place in the exact same region as the events of Purim - across the Middle East, stretching from India to

Africa and the battles are between autocrats and their people.

These parallels make you think: Redemption from Egypt 3323 years ago. Redemption in Persian Empire 2367 years ago. Redemption of the world in the 21st century.

How is this playing itself out today in the Middle East? In other parts of the world? In technology and other advancements of our time?

In those days, when King Achashverosh sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the capital (Esther 1:2)

... It all begins rather simply. A monarch sits on his throne, autocratically controlling an empire spanning from India to Ethiopia.

He decides to show off his wealth and opulence, throwing a party, lavishing his riches (as described in the Book of Esther).

But then the action begins: The totalitarian leader, who answered to nobody, gets

drunk and summons his wife as if she were his property. She refuses to be *humiliated*. He has her killed ... and all hell breaks loose. A new queen is searched for.

Fast forward 2011: On December 17 2010 (the 10th of Tevet, when the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem!) the Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi sets himself on fire — fed up with his *humiliation* — and sets on fire all of Tunisia and the entire region. Just 4 weeks later Ben Ali's 23-year rule of Tunisia comes to an end. A month later President Mubarak's 30 year rule of Egypt is over.

The entire Middle East is shaking.

V. “WHO’S WHO IN THE MEGILLAH?”

While we drink and make merry at the Purim Seudah, we can have some fun connecting the personalities that dominate the Megillah with their counterparts today (especially in relation to the current global battles playing out in the Middle East).

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.

These archetypes also relate in macrocosm to personality types that inhabit the earth, and in microcosm to the psychological forces that inhabit our personal psyches.

21. Achashverosh

Cosmic Order:

In the cosmic order, as the king, he represents the top. His name, Achashverosh, is an acronym of the Hebrew phrase *achris v'reishis shelo* (meaning "the end and the beginning are his"). He operates on the level where holiness and un-holiness are one, therefore the flow of his energy can go either to the evil Haman or to the goodly Mordechai.

Macrocosm:

On the level of earth, he is the leader of the world. But he is hard to pin down as he appears to empower both the good and the evil. Some say he is smart and cunning, some say stupid and clueless. He certainly vacillates. First he loves his wife Vashti, then he hates her and has her killed. He then begins an outrageously hilarious search for a new bride; women of all sorts line up, preening and perfuming themselves for the king. And at the end of all this, he chooses Esther as his queen.

Next, he is convinced by Haman to exterminate all the Jews. He suffers from insomnia, decides to reward Mordechai, the Jew, and then, in response to Esther's appeals, reverses his death decree. He has Haman hung and Mordechai rewarded and promoted to prominent leadership.

What's with this Achashverosh? Was he a good man or bad man? Was he a hero, a villain, or just an idiot who couldn't make up his mind?

And who today vacillates the way he did? Who would you nominate for the role today? (U.S. President Barack Obama perhaps? How about Germany's Angela Merkel who has done her share of vacillating about Libya? Or France's Nicolas Sarkozy, a president of a country which vacillates constantly when it comes to fighting evil?)

Psyche:

Achashverosh represents our daily struggles between good and evil, between divinity and immorality.

22. Haman

He was the Hitler of his time. His full name, Haman, son of Hamdasa, the Agagite, instantly identifies him as a member of the Nation of Amalek, the arch enemies of the Jewish people. Who was Amalek?

During the Exodus, as the Israelites were making their way from Egypt to Mount Sinai, the Nation of Amalek attacked them from behind, perpetrating the first terrorist act in history. As terrorists do today - and indeed, as Haman did in Persia - the Amalekites did not issue an

open challenge to war, because such a war they knew they could not win. They attacked the unarmed, the weak, the vulnerable and the defenseless. And as terrorists do today, their intent was to wreak psychological damage - to terrorize rather than to conquer - to paralyze the Israelites emotionally, to undermine their nascent self-confidence and fragile sense of reliance on G-d. For this reason, G-d decreed that we people must forever remember this incident and “obliterate the memory” of Amalek from under the heavens.¹¹

Note that in *Megillah*, though he is insulted by Mordechai the Jew, Haman is not satisfied with just having Mordechai put to death. He must (like Hitler) try to put to death the entire Jewish people.

Cosmic Order:

Kabbalistically, Haman represents the *keter* of *kelipah*, the “crown of the shell/source of negative energy.” He is identified with *gevurah* or “harsh restraint,” which corresponds to the *midat hadin*, the “characteristic of judgment.” As such he embodies the prosecutor of the Jewish people.

Macrocosm:

On the level of earth, he is the self-glorifying minister, who deviously seeks ultimate power, plotting to destroy any force that stands in his way.

Who would we cast as the Haman of our day? (Mahmud Ahmadinejad, President of Iran, perhaps? And there are so many other candidates like Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah ... or Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas ... or Osama Bin Ladin perhaps?)

Psyche:

On the level of the psyche (microcosm), he embodies arrogance and self-worship.

23. Mordechai

Mordechai was a great sage and the leader of the Jews of the Persian Empire. He is counted among the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* (the “Men of the Great Assembly”) who codified Jewish scriptures and prayer.

Cosmic Order:

In the cosmic order, Mordechai represents (obviously) the *sefirah* of *chochmah* (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. He is, like Moses, the alter-ego of Amalek.

Macrocosm:

On the level of earth, he is the holy man, the sage, the scholar who stands for Torah.

Which Jewish leader fits these criteria today? Do any even fit some?

Psyche:

On the level of psyche (microcosm), he is epitome of humility and unwavering faith. He refused to bow to any man and worshipped G-d alone.

24. Esther

Clearly, the heroine of the story Esther is willing to sacrifice her own life to save her people. She is beloved by all, as the *Megillah* testifies, from the eunuch of the harem who gives her preferential treatment to the king himself, and even by the Jewish people who unquestioningly respond to her call to fast and pray.

Cosmic Order:

In the cosmic order, Esther represents the *sefirah* of *malchut* (the “channel of royalty”). In the *Megillah*, she is also called Hadassah, the fragrant myrtle, though her dominant name Esther relates to a verse in the Book of Deuteronomy: “On that day, I [G-d] will conceal [in Hebrew, *haster astir*] My face.”¹²

Macrocsm:

On the level of earth, she is the heroine, who risks her life, hides behind enemy lines and saves her people.

Who would we nominate for the role of Esther today? Could Esther be you and me, responding to the challenge to play our part in the role of history, in the redemption of the world?

Psyche:

On the level of psyche (microcosm), she is the feminine implementer, doing what her male counterpart (Mordechai) advises and carrying his wise and holy instructions into the dark places of the king’s palace.

There are many other characters in the *Megillah*. Have fun finding their counterparts in the present:

25. Vashti

The woman who refused to be humiliated. The story begins with her death. Would she have started the feminist movement in her day had she had a chance?

26. Bigtan and Teresh

The conspirators who planned to assassinate the king. Do they represent the Islamist radicals of today? The Muslim Brotherhood perhaps? Hamas? Or do the oil moguls fit their mold more accurately?

27. Haman's Sons

Do they parallel Qaddafi's sons? The Saudi princes?

28. Heigai

The eunuch of the royal harem who recognized Esther's inner and outer beauty and helped her rise to power. Who is playing the behind-the-scenes role today that will have the same result for the Jewish people?

VI. "WHAT'S WHAT IN THE MEGILLAH?"

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

29. "*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.

30. 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 com-

memorate Purim through unity - sending food presents to friends and gifts to the poor. Jewish unity leads to redemption.

31. "*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."

32. "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 in the darkness beginning to emerge. The first five chap-


ters of the Megillah the Divine was "asleep". But on "that night" the sleep of the King of the universe was disturbed. The soul of the soul began to waken, and then G-d's Providence over His nation began to manifest itself.

33. "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)

VII. PURIM STORY

34. "Purim Fest at Nuremberg"

 On October 1, 1946, the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg sentenced twelve Nazis to death by hanging for crimes against humanity. Of these twelve two did not hang - Martin Bormann was missing at the time and was tried in absentia,¹³ and Hermann

Goering committed suicide in his cell by swallowing a cyanide capsule.

So it was that ten Nazis went to the gallows on October 16, 1946.

The following is an excerpt from a detailed report of the hangings by Howard K. Smith of the International

News Service. This excerpt concerns the ninth Nazi to be hanged, Julius Streicher:

While his manacles were being removed and his bare hands bound, this ugly, dwarfish little man, wearing a threadbare suit and a well-worn bluish shirt buttoned to the neck but without a tie (he was notorious during his days of power for his flashy dress), glanced at the three wooden scaffolds rising menacingly in front of him. Then he glanced around the room, his eyes resting momentarily upon the small group of witnesses. By this time, his hands were tied securely behind his back. Two guards, one on each arm, directed him to Number One gallows on the left of the entrance. He walked steadily the six feet to the first wooden step but his face was twitching.

As the guards stopped him at the bottom of the steps for identification formality he uttered his piercing scream: "Heil Hitler!" ... As he reached the platform, Streicher cried out, "Now it goes to G-d." He was pushed the last two steps to the mortal spot beneath the hangman's rope. The rope was being held back against a wooden rail by the hangman.

Streicher was swung suddenly to face the witnesses and glared at them. Suddenly he screamed, "Purim Fest 1946!"¹⁴

Why would Streicher scream "Purim Fest" - when in fact that day was the Jewish

holiday of Hoshana Rabba? Was he merely confused, or did he know something?

Streicher clearly knew something. As the editor of the anti-Semitic newspaper *Das Strummer*, he routinely published vitriolic attacks on the Jews, including an article titled *Das Purimfest*.¹⁵

For sure, he knew that Purim is a holiday when Jews celebrate their victory over enemies who sought to annihilate them. Undoubtedly, he knew how Haman (the Hitler of Persia) met his fateful end, and that Haman's ten sons were hanged on a similar gallows to that on which Streicher himself would die in the next few minutes.

But did he know the other amazing parallels?

For example, in the Megillah, the names of the ten sons of Haman are traditionally (and inexplicably) written in two parallel columns, with three letters written as smaller than the others and one as larger. The Belzer Rebbe has pointed out that the numerical values of the small letters add up to 707, and the large letter has the value of six. If the six is meant to refer to the sixth millennium of the Hebrew calendar, this strange configuration yields the year 5707 which was the year 1946, the year the Nazis were hanged.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Book of Esther *seems* confused when relating the death of Haman's sons. First it states:

The king said to Queen Esther: “In the capital city of Shushan, the Jews killed and annihilated five hundred men and Haman’s ten sons...”¹⁷

And in the very next verse, it states:

Esther replied: “If his majesty deems it proper, then let tomorrow, too, be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan ... and let Haman’s ten sons be hung from the gallows.”¹⁸

Aren’t they dead already?

The Talmudic sages comment¹⁹ on the word “tomorrow” in Esther’s request: “There is a tomorrow that is now, and a tomorrow which is later.”

Was October 16, 1946 the tomorrow later?

VIII. PURIM & CHILDREN

35. Our Greatest Asset

If you want to know your true strengths, study your enemy and see where he attacks first. Your enemy can be your best teacher: On your own you may be blinded or biased to your own strengths. But your enemy knows very well what about you threatens him. As such, he can identify and crystallize for you, and direct you, to your own source of power.

Throughout history our enemies of the Jewish people always targeted our children. Pharaoh of Egypt decreed that all newborn males be thrown into the Nile, lest their savior would arise. Haman of Persia targeted the children first saying:

“I will strike the young first.”

“If there are no kids, there will be no goats; if there are no goats, there will be no sheep; if there no sheep, there will be no shepherd; if there is no shepherd the world cannot exist. So, too, if there are no children, there will be no adults; if there are no adults, there will be no scholars; if there are no scholars, there will be no sages; if there are no sages, there will be no elders; if there are no elders, there will be no Torah; if there is no Torah, there will be no synagogues and houses of study. And if there are no synagogues and houses of study, the Holy One, blessed be He, will not cause His presence to rest in the world. What did he do? He locked all

the synagogues and houses of study so that the Torah would not be studied.”

The Jewish education of the children poses the greatest threat to our enemies because children carry the power of eternity: Educate your children and you guarantee that the chain of tradition will endure and perpetuate itself. “The children will grow into adults, the adults into scholars, the scholars into sages, the sages into elders etc.,” ad infinitum.

36. A Purim Midrash

On the night that Haman built his gallows, he went to Mordechai and found him seated with children before him, dressed in sackcloth and studying the Torah. He counted, and found 22,000 children seated there. Haman threw iron chains on them, and appointed guards to watch them, announcing, “Tomorrow, I will first kill these children and then hang Mordechai!”

The mothers of these children wanted to send food, but the children placed their hands on their holy books and vowed “on the life of Mordechai our Rebbe we will not eat or drink; we would rather die fasting.” They all burst out in tears, and their cries rose to the heaven.

Two hours into the night, G-d heard their cries. At that moment, G-d’s mercies were aroused and He arose from His seat of

judgment to go sit on His seat of compassion. G-d said, “What is this voice that I hear that sounds like kids and goats?”

Moses arose before G-d and said: “*Rebono Shel Olam*, these are not kids nor goats, these are the voices of your children, the youngsters of your nation, who are fasting now three days and three nights, who the enemy wants to slaughter tomorrow like kids and goats!”

At that moment G-d took the letters with the decrees [to kill the Jews] sealed in clay and tore them up. And He threw Achashverosh into a panic that night, as it says “that night the King’s sleep was disturbed...” (Midrash, Esther Rabba 9:4)

37. The Enemy Today

What relevance does this have today, when we live in freedom and do not have to worry about anyone closing down our schools or killing our children?

Today the enemy is within. It is called complacency and apathy. Just because we are free and comfortable doesn’t mean that we are healthy and wholesome. Quite the contrary.

Think about this: Why is it that when our adversaries closed down our schools and decreed that we cannot teach our children Torah, we sacrificed our lives to educate our children to preserve our

tradition. And today, when we have no such constrictions, only one in ten Jewish children receives a Jewish education?!!

What that does tell us about the nature of comforts and freedoms?

Given, today we may not have enemies without. But within... ahh, the enemy within can be far more dangerous.

The solution? Love the children. Teach them. Educate them. Inspire them. Protect them so that they can protect us. The prophet foresees that at the end of days "he will turn the heart of the fathers back through the children."²⁰

Instead of exposing our children to our impurities, instead of contaminating them with our toxins, let their purity shine and sanctify us.

In our selfish world, driven by greed, pettiness and all the woes resulting from our myopic material lifestyles, we need our pure children more than ever.

They are our only hope.



FOOTNOTES

¹ Talmud, Megillah 7b.

² Esther 9:22-28.

³ Rabbi Yaakov Halevi, 1360-1427.

⁴ Megillah 17a.

⁵ Esther 9:2-3. Also see the ending Esther 11:1-3.

⁶ Esther 10:27-28.

⁷ See Story by Robert McKee, Harper Collins, 1997.

⁸ Esther 4:7-8.

⁹ Esther 4:11.

¹⁰ See Endless Light by David Aaron, Simon & Schuster, 1994.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 25:17-18.

¹² Talmud, Chulin 139b. Deuteronomy 31:18.

¹³ Bormann's remains were later found and authenticated by DNA. See: "DNA test closes book on mystery of Martin Bormann, Independent, Bonn, 4 May 1998.

¹⁴ http://members.tripod.com/neal_ford/nureberg.html

¹⁵ Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair. http://ohr.edu/holidays/purim/deeper_insights/3440

¹⁶ Rabbi Avi Shafran, www.chabadtalk.com

¹⁷ Esther 9:12.

¹⁸ Esther 9:13.

¹⁹ Tanchuma, Bo 13 and Rashi, Shemot 13:14.

²⁰ Malachi 3:24.