

RABBI'S MESSAGE

WISE WORDS CAN WAIT

The month of Adar is a good time to remember the importance of women's voices. In Adar, we celebrate Purim, the popular holiday filled with costumes and parties and fun. The story we retell, of course, is about a scary time of hatred that almost resulted in the destruction of our people. The hero – or heroine in this case – is Queen Esther, and the *Megillah* that is read on Purim is the Book of Esther. Esther is one of two women in the entire Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) who have a book named after her. The other is Ruth, which we read on Shavuot, the holiday that commemorates receiving the Ten Commandments.

Esther displays her wisdom, with the help of her cousin Mordecai, by speaking up for the Jewish people at just the right time. Haman's plot to murder the Jewish began with his hatred for one Jew, Mordecai. By refusing to bow down to Haman, Mordecai insisted that his loyalty was for the Almighty One rather than a human being. This caused Haman to use his political influence over the King of Persia to declare a death sentence on all the Jews.

Hatred toward an entire people because of a disagreement with one member of the group is an obvious flaw in Haman. As we know from the *Megillah*, it backfired on him, and he suffered the same fate that he intended for Mordecai and the other Jews. Had it not been for Esther's courage, Haman's plan may have succeeded.

Esther was in the King's palace while all these plans were forming. She needed to calculate very carefully the right time to speak up. Knowing her husband, the King, Esther knew that if she spoke at the wrong time, he would not listen to her. She held her silence until it would be most effective.

A very simple but important teaching comes from Ecclesiastes, 3:8: "There is a time for everything; a time for every experience under Heaven..." Toward the end of this informative list, verse 7 states, "A time for ripping and a time for sewing; a time for silence and a time for speaking." It's interesting that these actions are paired with each other. We know that the wrong words at the wrong time – or even the *right* words at the wrong time – can tear things apart. The right words at the right time can provide comfort and even repair what's been torn. And sometimes, silence is just what is needed.

I have never been accused of being a man of few words. But I have learned that silent presence -- being attentive, listening and completely available – is often more valuable than any words. The magic comes when we learn at just the right time.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon