

RABBI'S MESSAGE

FINDING DOUBLE JOY

“Be Happy! It’s Adar!” This is the slogan that is proclaimed in Israel during this month on the Hebrew calendar. And, due to the mathematical way the Hebrew calendar works, every few years is a leap year, in which an extra month of Adar is added so that Passover will stay in springtime and not creep into the winter months. So, this year, we have TWO months of Adar, and our joy should be doubled.

Why is Adar considered the month of joy? One confusing tidbit about Adar is that it is the month that includes the death of Moses. Shouldn’t that be a day of mourning for our great leader? Judaism teaches that a *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of a death, can be a day to celebrate that person’s life. Rather than celebrate the birthday of someone who has passed away, the *yahrzeit* celebrates the time after the person’s lifetime of accomplishments, rather than just the accomplishment of being born.

But the main reason that Adar is considered the month of joy is because it includes the holiday of Purim. On Purim, we rejoice like at no other time in the year. Some indulge in alcohol, with the recommendation that we imbibe until we cannot tell the difference between the hero (Mordecai) and the villain (Haman). We dress up in silly costumes, sing festive songs, enjoy delicious *hamantaschen*, and make noise to drown out Haman’s name while reading the Book of Esther. Purim is a festival that is focused on children and fun. It is the classic holiday that gives us the narrative of many Jewish holidays: “They tried to kill us. It didn’t work. Let’s eat.”

On Purim, we celebrate our survival. Why did the Purim story take place? Because of the hatred and ignorance of Haman, who managed to get the support of the king and others. Why did the plan to annihilate the Jews fail? Because of Esther and Mordecai’s clever plan to educate the king. Of course, this explanation is much too simplistic, but there is a way to understand it in these terms. When Haman first presented his plan to exterminate the Jews, the king was ignorant of who he was even talking about. When the king learned that a man who saved his life was Jewish AND that his own wife was Jewish, he saw Jews as real people, rather than the myth that Haman had presented. Ignorance produces myth. Truly getting to know people makes a big difference.

Antisemitic thoughts and actions have continued throughout the generations. On one level, it may seem strange to celebrate a time when our people were nearly destroyed. The Book of Esther chronicles a time of great fear that turned into great strength. Yes, we are thrilled that we were able to defeat our opponent. At the same time, I wish a story like Purim never happened. I would rather not be threatened, than to be threatened and emerge victorious.

Unquestionably, our modern celebrations of Purim are all about fun. And they should be. We don’t need to dwell on the beginning of the story, in which the Jewish people were hated and

misunderstood. We can sing and dance and party to celebrate the strength, resilience and cleverness that has helped us thrive. And while we celebrate, we can add our own prayers that in the future, no nation will feel the threats of destruction due to hatred, prejudice and ignorance. As it says in our prayerbook, just before we sing *Shalom Rav*, a prayer for peace:

“God of peace, of justice and of love, be praised! Inspire us to banish forever, hatred, war and bloodshed. Help us to establish forever one human family united in peace. God of peace, bless us with peace.” (Gates of Prayer, pg. 97)

Let’s join together for a FUN Purim, that celebrates our victories of the past, and leads to a future of peace, understanding and togetherness.

L’shalom,

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