

# Happy Purim!

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

At the very end of the Megillat Esther (the Book of Esther we read on Purim) there is an amazing line that almost passes unnoticed. Here's the context. The Jewish people were under sentence of mass annihilation, initiated by Haman and agreed to by a drunken monarch whose brains had clearly sunken to another part of his anatomy. Mordechai had the foresight to plant his niece (some say his wife) in the harem (sure, she got to be chosen Queen on her own merits). He proved his loyalty to King Achashverosh by revealing a plot to assassinate him. He helped Esther plan her campaign. Thanks to both of them the Jews were saved. It is clear from his own wording that Mordechai did not claim any credit, but was certain of Divine intervention (Chapter 4:14) so he could not be accused of being an arrogant, self-serving, communal bigwig. Yet for all this, when they declared a day of celebration and instituted the festival of Purim with its laws of reading the Megillah, giving charity, giving gifts to friends and having a banquet, it says that Mordechai and Esther "were accepted by most of their brethren" (10:3).

Most? Most?! I ask you. They have saved the whole of the Jewish people and there are still some Jews who can't accept it, who simply have to object, complain and refuse to go along with them. Can you believe it? And it's not just me saying this. The Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 16b, "Why does it (the Megillah) say 'most of their brethren' instead of saying 'all of their brethren'? It teaches us that a minority of the Sanhedrin disagreed with him."

Here's a report from last week's Jerusalem Post.

A delegation from the anti-Zionist [Neturei Karta](#) sect is currently visiting Teheran to meet with senior officials and express their support for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his calls to eliminate Israel. In a statement to Iran's official IRIB radio, the group called for "the disintegration of the Zionist regime" and defended the Iranian president, saying that it "is a dangerous deviation to pretend that the Iranian president is an anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic personality." They added that they were "upset about the recent ploys, propaganda and tensions which have been created by the West regarding the statements of the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about a world free of Zionism, since this is nothing more than wishing for a better world dominated by peace and calm." At the meeting, according to the Iranian news agency IRNA, Weiss "praised the 'enlightening' statements of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about the Holocaust and said the establishment of a Zionist government and occupation of Palestine are contrary to the injunctions of Judaism."

Clearly, they brought in Purim ahead of time! Now you will say, "This is no laughing matter." But I claim it is. I can understand the Satmar ideology that we must wait for the Messiah. It is based on a Talmudic source that although it is disputed has to be understood on various levels. It says in Ketubot 11a that God made a deal with the Jewish people when they went into exile. For His part He promised that the Nations of the World would not overdo their oppression and in return the Jews had to agree not to rebel against them or try to force the return to the Land of Israel. We can argue about whether the Nations of the World kept their side of the bargain or not. Most religious authorities have never taken this as a legally binding idea. I do not at all support [Satmar](#), but I can understand the desire to reject political initiatives or a system of governance that allows religion to enter the stink fields of politics.

But facts on the ground are that the ultra-Orthodox community has thrived and expanded under the Zionist Entity, and its families and institutions given wide support and tax breaks that have enabled them to expand exponentially. Do they really believe that under a Palestinian or Iranian regime they would receive such favorable treatment?

It is one thing to attack and criticize a Zionist State. It is quite another to consort with those who seek to annihilate it. That is like cozying up to Haman, not to mention Hitler. I suspect even the worthies of the Sanhedrin who thought Mordechai had no right to make new customs or laws would not have put themselves on Haman's guest list. And I have no doubt that those who disagreed had excellent halachic arguments. Mordechai was adding on the Torah, which is forbidden. He was inventing new blessings that might have required taking God's name in vain. They would have been no less persuasive than the vast majority of modern rabbis who like to argue that unless you take a microscope to a lettuce leaf you are breaking the law on bugs.

What a funny people we are. We are so unbelievably self-destructive. It has been said in jest that "anti-Semitism is disliking Jews more than is absolutely necessary." Here we are, barely 12 million surrounded by billions of enemies and we can't agree on anything.

When I write an article critical of a Right-Wing American professor, his response is to hurl [abuse about Loshon Hara](#) and disparage my brothers. When I criticize individuals in Lubavitch for inventing myths, [I am accused of attacking the whole movement](#). What's wrong with us? Can't we disagree politely? Are we so damaged by thousands of years of anti-Semitism that we are simply crippled?

I think Purim is so important precisely because it invites us to laugh at ourselves as well. Some of us Jews have always been very eager to attend drunken orgies, to cozy up to corrupt rich monarchs, and ease out of our religious tradition altogether. Many of those that have remained loyal have been so determined not to give an inch that they have retreated behind the most absurd of fences. So it's hardly surprising that, despite being saved from extinction time and time again, we are so uptight that we can't even agree on how to thank God.

What a shower we are. No wonder some argue that the only way to really celebrate Purim is to get drunk.

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