



PURIM: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE BEAUTIFUL OR WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT THESE DAYS!

Once upon a time, there lived a Persian king, whose name was too difficult to pronounce, but this is how it reads: Ahasuerus. One day, the king's wife, Queen Vashti, disobeyed him, so he divorced her and had a beauty pageant to choose another queen.

The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful

A good and humble Jew named Mordechai was the guardian of his beautiful niece, Esther. Mordechai sent Esther to the contest, and she defeated all the other beauties and became the new queen. However, following her uncle's order, Esther did not tell the king that she was Jewish.

At around that time there was a very bad man whose name was very easy to pronounce—Haman. He was the king's prime minister, and could talk the king into almost anything!

Haman had a special quirk: he could not stand Jews. One day, he went to the king and told him: "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples." Haman explained to the king that he'd be better off without them because they don't keep his laws. The king readily agreed (because who wants outlaws in his kingdom?) and gave Haman the go-ahead to kill them.



When Mordechai heard about it, he was flabbergasted. The first thing he did was tear his clothes, cover himself with a sack, and pour ashes all over himself. When that didn't change the verdict, he started yelling about it all over town until he reached the king's gate.

Esther heard about her uncle's "fit" and was startled. She sent servants to dress him up but he refused. He told them to tell Esther about the plan to kill all the Jews, and that she must go and beg the king to undo it.

Esther was terrified because she didn't think the king would agree to her request. When she finally agreed, after some crafty persuasion on the part of Mordechai, she said that her one condition was that the Jews would gather and unite in thought of her success. "Then," she said, "although it's against the protocol to approach the king unless he calls for you, I will do it, and hope for a miracle."

The Miracle of Purim



The rest is history: The miracle happened and the king greeted Esther warmly and accepted her request. She told him she was Jewish and that Haman was planning to kill them all. The king got so upset that he not only undid the decree, but hung Haman and his entire family on the very tree Haman had prepared for Mordechai. Since then we've been commanded to be merry on that day, eat lots of pastries called *hamantasches* (Haman's Ears), and get so sloshed that we can't tell good (Mordechai) from bad (Haman).

Helping the World Find Peace

Besides being a lot of fun, Purim has a very important (and serious) message for us, especially these days when anti-Jewish feelings are surging all over: The only "weapon" that we have against our enemies is unity. We can and should protect ourselves and our loved ones. But if we want a final defeat of our enemies, fighting them will not do it, but uniting among ourselves will move mountains!

The custom of bringing gifts to the poor (usually pastries such as hamantasches and wine) is a sign of closeness, an expression of desire to bring all factions of the nation together. Our great sages throughout the generations have told us over and over that through unity we will be saved from any enemy or hardship. *The Book of Zohar* even tells us, in the portion, *Aharei Mot*, that thanks to our unity there will be peace on Earth.

These days there are plenty of Hamans around us. They are reminders that we need to unite just as the Jews did back in Persia, and that if we do, no harm will come to us.

Moreover, as *The Book of Zohar* writes, through our unity we can help the world find peace. The world is already blaming us for causing all the wars, although we clearly have no such intentions. So if we show them our unity, and that we actually want to share this unity with them(!), it will serve as an example of brotherly love that no other nation can display.

Rekindling the Love between us

All other nations can unite only against a common enemy. We are the only nation in history that has ever united for the sake of unity itself! Today, this is what the world needs—unity for the sake of unity. We can rekindle it among us and offer it to a love-thirsty world.

Our sages explain that Haman is a symbol of our evil inclination, our own hatred of others. The Hamans within us stop us from caring for others, but also make the world blame us for their wars. We, Jews, a nation that in previous generations practiced "love your neighbor as yourself," can now revive these feelings within us and overcome our inner Hamans. When we do so, the world will see the real value of Judaism—that it is not about having a sense of superiority, but about truly caring for all people; a perception of humanity as one soul, one entity that, when united, achieves unimaginable bliss.

If there is one thing the nations should do, is push us toward that—toward unity—so we may pass it on and become "a light unto nations," as is indeed our task. The nations' anti-Semitism forces us to unite, but only in order to escape the trouble. We need to learn to unite because unity brings joy, strength, and prosperity to all. When we come to that, there will be no hatred whatsoever, no anti-Semitism, wars, or any ill-will among people. **Happy Purim eVeryone.**

