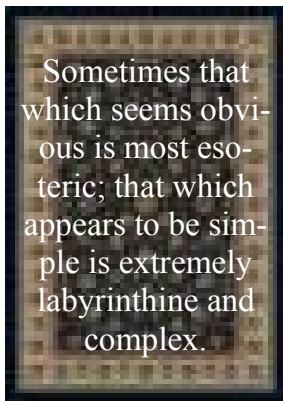


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HIDE AND SEEK

Sometimes that which seems obvious is most esoteric; that which appears to be simple is extremely labyrinthine and complex.



The patina of raucous celebration and the emphasis on physical joy which characterize the festival of Purim merely

mask something which is so sublime that it beggars any form of expression in the physical world.

Let us first briefly examine that which has been revealed to us about the Purim story. The story takes place during the period when the Persian empire dominated the ancient world. The plot abounds with palace intrigue. The king's crafty vizier hatches a nefarious scheme to exterminate the entire Jewish people. The queen, who is secretly Jewish, devises a plan of her own to save her nation and snare the evil Ha-



Shushan— capital of the Persian Empire, which stretches from India to Ethiopia

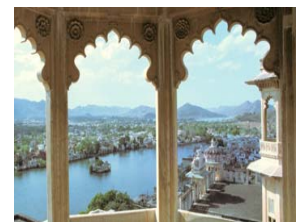
man. Mordechai, Queen Ester's relative and Haman's nemesis, uncovered a plot to assassinate the king thereby earning his gratitude.

In the end the story is inverted. Haman, who was plotting to execute Mordechai, was literally hoisted with his own petard. The enemies of the Jewish people who looked forward to exe-

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You Can Make A Difference!

The Jewish Learning Experience is a non-profit organization that aims to bring Jews closer to their Jewish heritage by providing educational and experiential programs in a warm, non-threatening environment. To further this aim, we would like to produce the **JLE Journal** on a regular basis. You can help us achieve this by advertising, or sponsoring an edition. For further information please contact Rabbi Price at (201) 833-1328 or at jlerabbi@hotmail.com.

PURIM: A FEW LAWS & CUSTOMS

THE FAST OF ESTHER

One should fast on the day prior to Purim to commemorate the fact that the Jewish people gathered together and prayed, fasted & repented on the 13th of Adar prior to their battle of self-defense. It is called “the Fast of Esther” to remind us that G-D is mindful of those who turn to him and fast and repent sincerely at their moment of distress.

This fast is not as stringent as the other public fast days. Therefore, one who does not feel well and would suffer greatly by fasting may refrain from fasting on that day. He must make up for it on another day when he feels better. Pregnant and nursing women need not fast even if they do not feel distressed.

The fast begins before sunrise and ends after nightfall. This year (2002/5762) the fast is on Monday, February 25th. It ends at 6:28pm.

It is incumbent upon every Jew- man, woman & child of an educable age to read (hear) the Megillah twice during Purim- once in the evening & once during the day. The Megillah is the hand-written scroll of parchment containing the thrilling account of the near annihilation and miraculous rescue of the Jewish people in the ancient Persian empire.

READING THE MEGILLAH

Before the scroll is read, it is unrolled and folded over a number of times like a letter, which is what it refers to itself as.

The reader recites three blessings before he begins. The audience responds “amen” to each blessing. The blessings are translated as follows:

“Blessed are You, HaShem our GOD, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding the reading of the Megillah.”

“Blessed are You, HaShem our GOD, King of the universe who has performed miracles for our fathers at this season.”

“Blessed are You, HaShem our GOD, King of the universe Who has granted us life and sustenance and permitted us to reach this season.”

The custom is that the four verses referring to Israel’s redemption are recited first by the congregation and then repeated by the reader.



There is a well-known custom to bang and make a noise when the name of the arch-villain Haman is mentioned. Children take special delight in this. This custom stems from the biblical commandment to obliterate any memory of the evil nation Amalek, of whom Haman was a scion. Nevertheless there is a mitzvah to hear *every word* read from the Megillah & the reader should not continue until complete silence has been restored.

After the reading is completed, the scroll is rolled up and the concluding blessing is recited: “Blessed are You, HaShem our GOD, King of the universe Who champions our cause and vindicates our rights, taking revenge for us, repaying all our mortal enemies as they deserve and punishing our oppressors. Blessed are You HaShem, Who repays in kind the oppressors of Israel, the redeeming GOD.” The assembled community then erupts in the joyous singing of hymns describing the miraculous salvation of our nation.

THE SENDING OF GIFTS



On Purim day, every Jewish man and

woman is required to send to at least one friend two different types of ready-to-eat foods. This mitzvah is based on a verse in the Megillah and is designed to promote unity and goodwill among the Jewish people.



GIFTS TO THE POOR

During Purim day, every Jewish man and woman is obligated to give food or money to at least two needy individuals. This too is based on a verse in the Megillah. If there happen to be no poor people around that day, money should be set aside on Purim for the needy for later disbursement. This mitzvah too promotes Jewish unity and enables the less fortunate to cele-



brate the festival of national salvation with the proper exuberance.

THE PURIM FEAST

There is a mitzvah to participate in a special festive Purim meal. The majority of the feast should take place during the day of Purim, but it is customary for this celebratory marathon repast to continue well into the night.



There is an unusual obligation to imbibe wine “until one reaches a state in which he cannot distinguish between ‘Blessed is Mordechai’ (a hero of the Purim narrative) and ‘Cursed is Haman’ (the villain). The halachic (Jewish legal) authorities provide various explanations for this unusual measurement. Some explain that

one should drink a little more than usual, until drowsiness sets in at which point one would not be able to distinguish between the two concepts mentioned above. Others explain that the *gematria* (numerological values of the Hebrew letters) of the phrases is equal. When one reaches a level of intoxication at which one would have difficulty calculating the math- one has fulfilled one’s drinking duties. All agree that there is no mitzvah to reach a stage at which one’s conduct is inappro-

priate and embarrassing.

PURIM COSTUMES



A custom has developed, especially for children, to dress up on Purim. Masks are commonly worn and favorite costumes include the cast of characters from the Megillah.

Of course, as is the case with Jewish customs in general, there is a deep message behind the custom.

It reinforces the message of the Megillah that in this world, all is not as it seems. All the world is truly a stage.

All that surrounds us in the physical world is merely a façade, a challenge to our developing spirituality. Individuals may make choices, good and bad, but behind the scenes the steady hand of GOD guides history along a grand course towards its ultimate destiny. Those who try to oppose the Divine scheme by attempting to harm the Jewish people, no matter how invincible and menacing they

appear to be, will, like the evil Haman, ultimately be consigned to the garbage heap of history.

SHUSHAN PURIM

The “second day of Purim” is known as *Shushan Purim*. This day, the fifteenth of Adar is celebrated since the Jews of the Persian capital city of Shushan only rested and celebrated their miraculous victory the day after their brethren in the outlying towns and villages. Purim is actually celebrated on this day in Jerusalem and other cities which had walls (like Shushan) in ancient times.

Although Purim is celebrated on the 14th of Adar in most places, the 15th still has the status of a day of extra joy.

PURIM IS HERE - THAT MEANS PESACH IS NEAR...

It is customary to start studying the laws relating to a particular festival thirty days before the festival begins. This is of particular significance for the festival of Passover which is enmeshed in a multitude of special laws and customs.

We Jews are not one’s for resting on our laurels. We should savor the moment of the miracle of Purim and the victory over the forces of evil, but we should look ahead too. There are thirty days between Purim and Passover. It’s time to prepare for the next challenge in our ongoing quest for spiritual growth...

Of course, **The Jewish Learning Experience** is here to assist in that

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quest.

We will be offering a special pre-Passover “How to...” class on **Thursday evening, March 21st at 8:15pm at Congregation. Beth Aaron, 950 Queen Anne Rd., Teaneck.** Stay tuned for further details.

The JLE is also offering another very special program. On the first night of Passover, **Wednesday evening, March 27th at 6:45pm** the JLE will be hosting an **explanatory Pesach seder**. This promises to be an enjoyable, educational, social & spiritually-uplifting event. The seder will be held in the elegant social hall of **Con-**

(Continued from page 1)

cuting Haman's edict and profiting from the spoils were decisively defeated by their intended victims. Mordechai who was to be hanged on a high gallows became an honored royal confidant. For the Jewish nation, which seemed destined for total annihilation, “there was light and joy and gladness and honor”.

This confounding turn of events seems to have come about through a bizarre series of coincidences unlike other biblical accounts of miracles and blatant Divine intervention. Perhaps the most striking feature of this book of the Bible is the absence of any direct reference to G-D. He seems to have hidden Himself from our view.



In fact, our sages teach that that is exactly what happened. The very name of the book and the protagonist means “hidden”. Ester's actual name was Hadassah, but throughout the story she is referred to as Esther.

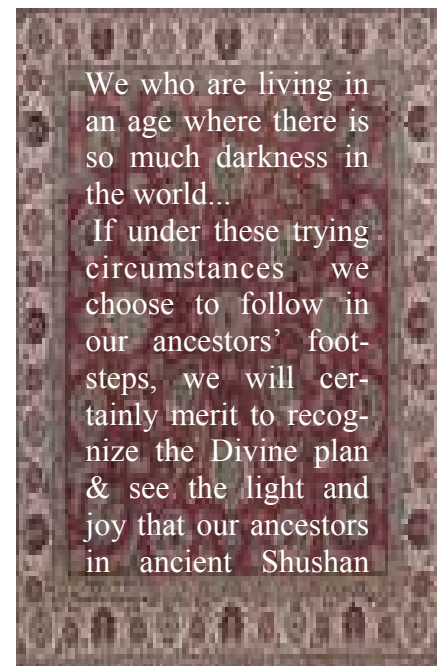
The Talmud, based on a verse in the Megillah, tells us that in the time of Mordechai & Esther, the Jewish people “re-accepted” the Torah and fulfilled it. Why was it necessary to “re-accept the Torah? How do we see that the Jews of the

Persian era fulfilled that which the Jews of the Exodus did not? What does this have to do with the physical nature of our celebration of Purim (feasting, drinking)?

Our tradition teaches that the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai “under duress”. What does that mean? When one considers the fact that the generation of the Exodus witnessed the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea and the greatest audio-visual display in history when G-D revealed Himself at the giving of the Torah, what choice did they have? Can *anyone* say “no” to G-D when He addresses one directly? When G-D puts His hand on your shoulder and tells it like it is, freedom of choice remains a nice theory.

A millennium later circumstances were very different. The Temple was destroyed. The Jewish people found themselves in a bitter exile faced with extinction. The miracles of the days of yore were but a sweet memory. G-D did not seem to be standing up for us. And yet, in those most ominous of circumstances, the Jewish people chose to return to G-D and to renew their commitment to their ancient faith. At that moment of sincere return, it was revealed that what appeared to be a haphazard series of events, were in fact pieces of the puzzle of a Divine plan.

The way which we celebrate Purim is revealing. The drinking of wine, which seems an unlikely route to spiritual enlightenment, is encapsulated by the Talmudic dictum-”the wine goes in; the secrets come out”. The physical world,



We who are living in an age where there is so much darkness in the world...

If under these trying circumstances we choose to follow in our ancestors' footsteps, we will certainly merit to recognize the Divine plan & see the light and joy that our ancestors in ancient Shushan

which seems so devoid of G-dliness, when used correctly, can be a vehicle for revealing G-D Who seems to be so well-hidden.

We who are living in an age where there is so much darkness in the world, where tyrants trod roughshod over the helpless, where unrepentant murderers are

