

Happy Purim

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The jolly festival of Purim is celebrated every year on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar (**February 28-March 1, 2018**). It commemorates the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day," as recorded in the Megillah (book of Esther).

The Story in a Nutshell

The Persian Empire of the 4th century BCE extended over 127 lands, and all the Jews were its subjects. When King Ahasuerus had his wife, Queen Vashti, executed for failing to follow his orders, he arranged a beauty pageant to find a new queen. A Jewish girl, Esther, found favor in his eyes and became the new queen, though she refused to divulge her nationality.

Meanwhile, the Jew-hating Haman was appointed prime minister of the empire. Mordechai, the leader of the Jews (and Esther's cousin), defied the king's orders and refused to bow to Haman. Haman was incensed, and he convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all the Jews on the 13th of Adar, a date chosen by a lottery Haman made.

Mordechai galvanized all the Jews, convincing them to repent, fast and pray to G-d. Meanwhile, Esther asked the king and Haman to join her for a feast. At a subsequent feast, Esther revealed to the king her Jewish identity. Haman was hanged, Mordechai was appointed prime minister in his stead, and a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies.

On the 13th of Adar, the Jews mobilized and killed many of their enemies. On the 14th of Adar, they rested and celebrated. In the capital city of Shushan, they took one more day to finish the job.

Why Is It Called Purim?

Purim means "lots" in ancient Persian. The holiday was thus named since Haman had thrown lots to determine when he would carry out his diabolical scheme. You can pronounce this name many ways. In Eastern tradition, it is called poo-REEM. Among Westerners, it is often called PUH-rim. Some Central-European communities even call it PEE-rim. (WARNING: Calling this holiday PYOO-rim—as English speakers are sometimes wont to do—is a sure-fire newbie cover-blower.)

Purim Observances

1) Reading of the Megillah (book of Esther), which recounts the story of the Purim miracle. This is done once on the eve of Purim and then again on the fol-

lowing day.

- 2) Giving money gifts to at least two poor people.
- 3) Sending gifts of two kinds of food to at least one person.
- 4) A festive Purim feast, which often includes wine or other intoxicating beverages.

Purim Customs

- There is a spirit of liveliness and fun on Purim that is unparalleled on the Jewish calendar. If there were ever a day to "let loose" and just be Jewish, this is it!

- It is also customary for children (and adults, if they desire) to dress up in costumes.

- A traditional Purim food is hamantaschen (or oznay Haman), three-cornered pastries bursting with poppy seeds or another sweet filling.

- On the day before Purim (**February 28, 2017**), it is customary to fast, commemorating Esther's fasting and praying to G-d that He save His people.

When to Celebrate

One of the unique aspects of Purim is the diverse timing for its celebration.

- Common Custom: Jews all over the world celebrate Purim on Adar 14, the day when our ancestors rested from the war against their enemies.

- Walled Cities: Since the Jews of Shushan rested one day later, their Purim was deferred to the 15th. This was extended to include any city that was surrounded by walls in the days of Joshua, notably Jerusalem.

The Significance of Purim

In addition to the miracle of Jewish survival despite the efforts of our enemies, Purim celebrates G-d's intimate involvement in every aspect of this world. Even though there were no overt miracles recorded in the Megillah—indeed, His name is not even mentioned once—G-d was actively "pulling the strings" to care for His nation.

Additionally, Haman's edict catalyzed a spiritual revival among the Jews. In a sense, this was even more significant than the Covenant at Sinai—an overwhelming spiritual experience that compelled the Jews to accept the Torah—since it occurred of their own volition, even as they were scattered among the Persian people and immersed in their culture. It was in the merit of this spiritual reawakening that G-d orchestrated their salvation.

Jewish Story

By Tzvi Jacobs

"Hi, Mom. Got my orders today," David Zuk said. "I'm going to Saudi. I have to leave first thing tomorrow morning.

"Oh, no," his mother said, her "no" echoing in her 20-year old son's head.

"I was assigned to the 101st," David said with a sinking voice, as he slumped against the glass wall of the phone booth. "I almost cried when they told me."

The 101st Airborne Division, nicknamed the "Screaming Eagles," fought on the front lines during all the wars: World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and Viet Nam. Only a fraction of the early ranks had ever returned alive.

David's mother tried to find encouraging words for her only son, but it was hard. She had never been able to get used to her son's unpredictable life choices. When he was 16, he had become involved with Orthodox Jews and made himself separate from the family by eating only kosher. Two years later when he joined the Army, she just about gave up. Now, upon hearing this ominous news, all she could think was, "I told you so."

The Gulf War had broken out a month earlier, on January 17, 1991. David knew he would be on the front lines, facing the open jaws of the ravenous war. "They said we'll be there at least a year," David said, not knowing when he would see her next. "Take care, Mom. I love you," he added faintly,

David closed the door of the phone booth and ambled back to his barrack. Gazing at the snow-covered hills surrounding Fort Knox Army Base in northwestern Kentucky, he was awe-struck by their quiet beauty, as if seeing them for the first time. He wondered if he would ever see them again. He thought of the preposterous story circulating around the army base that someone had predicted the war would end by Purim, the Jewish holiday instituted to thank and praise G-d for saving the Jewish people from a decree of annihilation some 2,300 years ago.

"Purim's only a month away. No way it will be over by then!" David said to himself.

Saddam Hussein, thought David, certainly fits the character of Haman, the villain of the story of Purim. The wicked Haman got the king of Persia to issue a royal decree to command the populace to massacre all the Jews in the Persian Empire. Similarly, for a whole year Saddam Hussein had been boasting that he would "burn half of Israel" with SCUD missiles laden with deadly chemical gas. Those missiles would surely maim and kill thousands of Israelis and prove to the Arab nations that Israel was vulnerable. Then the world would clearly see that G-d had forsaken the Jews as the "Chosen People," and that instead Saddam Hussein had been chosen to rule the world. The scenario sounded preposterous... until Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

Back at the barracks, David stood beside his cot

and daavened (prayed) the evening prayer. How ironic that he was being shipped to war to defend Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Before falling asleep, he vividly recalled news clips of the SCUD missiles fired at cities in Israel. These 40-foot Soviet-made missiles had been enhanced with a 600-pound, European-made payload of explosives. Designed to flatten buildings, the explosion of a SCUD warhead creates a frontal pressure wave that blasts away concrete and sends shattered glass flying up to 1,400 feet away in all directions, creating a torrent of lethal "knives."

As David lay in his bed, he continued to recall the news he had heard and read from Israel. The first night that SCUDs were fired at Israel, one of them made a direct hit on an apartment house in a crowded Tel Aviv neighborhood. As a result of this midnight strike, 400 apartments housing 1,200 people were either destroyed or damaged. Tel Aviv hospitals were prepared to handle mass casualties, as had been the experience in Teheran, Iran, when Iraq fired SCUDs into Teheran's neighborhoods in 1988 during the Iran-Iraq War.

The ambulances arrived at a Tel Aviv hospital. One young man had some scratches from broken glass; a woman had a sprain; the injuries were all minor. "The 'victims' could have doctored themselves," said one of the hospital staff. "Even the non-religious declared it a miracle."

During the first week of war, Iraq fired about two dozen SCUDs at Israel and damaged or destroyed thousands of apartments and other buildings. On the first Saturday of the attacks, one SCUD scored a direct hit on a bomb shelter, which was used as a makeshift synagogue on Saturday morning; two hundred worshippers were packed inside. The blast flung the people around like rag dolls. Only the shelter's eastern wall, upon which the ark housing the Torah scroll leaned against, remained standing. When Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir visited the site he asked if there were any people in the bomb shelter. "Yes," replied Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat, "Two hundred. They were saved by a miracle." No one was injured.

How long would their mazal (good fortune) last? To protect Israel, David was ready to risk his life. With that thought, David whispered the Shema Yisrael ("Hear O' Israel") prayer and fell asleep.

The next morning David and more than 300 other soldiers boarded a chartered 747 headed towards Saudi Arabia. They refueled in Rome at midnight and took off after two hours. Within minutes, David drifted into a deep sleep. In what seemed like minutes later but in reality turned out to be six hours, a blinding light flooded the cabin of the jet. David peered through the thick window next to his seat. "So this is Saudi," he mused. A harsh sun reflected off the whitest sand he had ever seen. Miles and miles of sand. For the next hour and a half, all David saw below was white sand, with an occasional darkened area which appeared to be some sort of man-made rock formation.

"the days of darkness were transformed to light, joy and happiness."

The 747 jet landed in the coastal city of Dhahran. David stepped down from the plane into the 115 degree heat. He felt like he had marched into a huge solar oven. The soldiers were transported across the burning sand to a stadium-size tent. They were directed to their cots and told to go to sleep.

At 5:30 the next morning, nerve-shattering alarms blasted the dawn. In a heartbeat, David reached for his gas mask, took the required quick breath, and strapped the mask to his face. The maximum time limit for this procedure was 15 seconds; David did it in 3 seconds flat. Thousands of gas mask rehearsals had finally paid off. Like a machine gun firing into the dark, David's heart pounded uncontrollably at an invisible enemy. Three minutes later, an officer came into the tent and announced, "The Iraqis fired a SCUD, and our Patriot missile intercepted it. No gas has been detected. Keep your masks on until the signal is given."

No gas was detected and no one was injured, but Saddam won a round on the psychological battlefield. Besides the constant fear of chemical weapons, Hussein had another silent ally: the desert. The first troops sent in August had all become sick with heat strokes. Even in the "winter," the midday temperature always rose above 110 degrees Fahrenheit. The desert proved to be a harsh, foreign environment. Water had to be rationed. Showers were allowed only once a month.

Every day, just before sunset, the hot, white sun would turn bright red, and at sunset, it would appear to melt into the sand — an orangish red lava flowing off a huge ball of fire across the white sand. Then, within minutes, the temperature would drop 50 degrees. Everyone would have to wear thermal gloves and a warm jacket to keep from shivering. The temperature would be only 60 to 70 degrees, yet because of the rapid and drastic change in temperature, the soldiers would feel as if they were freezing.

Hussein was proving himself to be more cunning and his soldiers more entrenched than originally thought. Dave heard reports that Hussein could drag out the war for years.

Saddam Hussein kept firing SCUDS into Israel. Civilian targets were hit, buildings were destroyed, but the human injuries were surprisingly light. Back in the States, many Americans were concluding that the SCUDS were basically harmless, giant firecrackers.

Then, on the morning of February 25, David and 100 other soldiers received orders to fly that evening to Al-Khobar. They would be staying in the nearby Army barrack, which had originally been a large, steel-framed warehouse. Later that evening, during supper-time, a fragment of a SCUD blasted through the barrack's metal roof, followed by a gigantic explosion which was heard for miles around. Nothing was left of the barrack, except an eight-foot deep crater. Twenty-eight soldiers were killed in the ensuing explosion; 89 others, wounded.

"I'm supposed to be dead," David said to himself. At the last moment, the plane scheduled to transport David and 100 fellow soldiers to Al-Khobar the previous evening had malfunctioned. The "malfunction" saved their lives.

Before that attack, the American soldiers felt no anger towards the Iraqis, but now they were enraged. They wanted Saddam Hussein dead. Hussein became their Haman, the very embodiment of evil. They felt like the Jews who stamp their feet when the name of Haman is mentioned during the public reading of the Scroll of Esther on the Purim holiday: they wanted him stamped out, once and for all.

The Gulf War intensified and the Allied forces became more aggressive, sending countless air-raids into Iraq. The Army transferred David to the front lines, 50 miles from the village of Ur Kasdim, where the Jewish patriarch Abraham had refused to bow down to the idols of King Nimrod. The pagan king subsequently threw young Abraham into a fiery furnace, yet miraculously he was not burned.

On the quiet nights, when sorties were not taking off from the Army's makeshift runway, David often gazed at the stars. There were no lights for hundreds of miles and David could see thousands of stars in the Milky Way. Here G-d's blessing and promise to Abraham, "I will increase your seed as the stars of the heaven" (Genesis 22:17), had great meaning.

By now Saddam's army had fired more than 30 SCUDS which struck Israel. If only he could drag Israel into the war, then the other Arab nations would unite with him, and he would rule the oil-rich Middle East and the world would be at his mercy.

Suddenly, then the long-awaited land war was underway. The Allies marched into Kuwait and invaded Iraq. Then, on February 27, after a mere 100 hours of Allied fighting, the BBC announced that the Persian Gulf War was over. Not for a moment did any of the soldiers believe it. Two weeks later, on March 11, 1991, Newsweek published a cover story on the war and called the Persian Gulf War "a triumph of almost Biblical proportions." Only after returning to the United States, did David find out that the War had actually ended on Purim.

With David, every single soldier in the 101st Airborne Division returned home, alive! Like in the days following the miracle of Purim, joyous celebrations and prayers of thanksgiving were held in towns throughout America, and "the days of darkness were transformed to light, joy and happiness."

Thirteen months after the Gulf War ended, while stationed at Fort Campbell, David spent Shabbat at the home of Rabbi Zalman Posner in Nashville, Tennessee. "Have you seen this booklet?" his host asked. David glanced at it, and saw it was entitled, "I Will Show You Wonders: Public Statements of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, Before and During the Gulf Crisis."

David had never before heard of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. On that Shabbat, he learned about the Rebbe's predictions regarding the Gulf War, how the Rebbe publicly proclaimed that the Land of Israel would be safe and that nobody in Israel would need gas masks, and that it was said in the Rebbe's name that the Gulf War would end by Purim.

Following the Gulf War, David completed a two-year stint in the Army and then joined the ranks of young men studying Torah in the Yeshiva Tiferet Bachurim at the Rabbinical College of America, in Morristown, New Jersey.

Sources: Private First-Class David Zuk; "Missiles and Miracles: The SCUD Story" David Rothschild (Nefesh Magazine, 1992); "Why Were SCUD Casualties So Low?" S. Fetter, G. Lewis & L. Gronlund (Nature, Jan. 1993).

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/39446/jewish/Purim-Saddam.htm

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Middos— Character Development

Continued from last month

The Torah puts great stress on character development — on becoming better people. This is called Tikkun [correcting] Middot [our character]. We must always strive to correct our faults and improve our character. The Torah also lays down a number of moral laws. The following is a shortlist of ways to better ourselves and a number of moral laws.

Kvod HaRav— Honoring Teachers

Due honor must be given to rabbis and teachers. Children should stand when they enter the room and always show Derech Eretz.

Emet — Truth

Emet means truth. One must always tell the truth. Emet is made from three Hebrew letters א, מ, ט and א, the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet, to teach us that truth is from the beginning to the end, the whole truth. It is forbidden to lie [except when telling “white lies” to preserve the peace].

Shalom — Peace

“Great is peace — for the Torah was given to bring peace to the world.”

One must always search for a peaceful solution to any difficult matter. The Torah ascribes the greatness of Aharon [Moses’ brother] to the fact that he always made peace between his fellow men.

Anava — Humility

Never be haughty — always be humble. Know your advantages and your disadvantages. Always try to look at other people’s good points. Never be arrogant.

Simchah — Joy

“Serve G-d with joy.” Imagine if a great king asked you to do him a small favor. Wouldn’t you run with joy to do it? So too, G-d has asked us to keep mitzvot and we should be full of joy and happiness when keeping them. Joy is called Simchah.

Teshuvah — Return/Repentance

If a Jew does something wrong, G-d wants him to do Teshuvah — to repent. Teshuvah comprises of three stages;

- 1) Regret — to regret the misdeed.
- 2) Vidui — verbal expression ... to say out loud [to yourself, not in front of others] what you have done wrong.
- 3) Resolve never to do it again.

One should do Teshuvah a whole year for one’s misdeeds, but particularly one should do Teshuvah on Yom Kippur.

Tzniut— Modesty

A person should always be modest both in dress and in character, whether in public or in private.

The Torah has a dress code for men and women. Parts of the body which are usually covered must be covered at all times. Men should cover their heads with a kipah, or Yarmulka [this is an Aramaic word meaning Yarei = fear, Malka = King. A Yarmulka reminds you that you stand before the King of Kings at all times]. Married women should cover their hair with a scarf, hat or wig (shaitel). A woman’s skirt should cover her knees and shirt sleeves should cover the elbow.

A man may not wear women’s clothing and vice versa. The Torah also teaches that boys and girls should not touch each other (shomer negia), nor act in an indecent manner.

Jewish Joke

At Hyman’s recent medical check up, his doctor asked him a few questions. Here’s how Hyman answered these questions: -

Q. How do you feel? A. How should I feel?

Q. What hurts you? A. What doesn't hurt me?

Q. When do you feel bad? A. When don't I feel bad?

Q. When did it start? A. When will it end, better?