

The Months of Spring: Purim through Pesach

The Months of Spring

A Journey from Purim to Pesach

In the Jewish world, we're moon-watchers, because each new month begins on the new moon. In the late winter we look up into the night sky and sight the slim crescent New Moon of the Hebrew month called Adar, the month whose motto is:

With the month of Adar, Joy increases!

Why? - because winter is winding down, and the festival of Purim is coming!

One month (moonth!) later we'll see the new moon of Nisan, which arrives in the night sky to really herald the coming of spring!. This new moon ushers in the month of Nisan, The Month of Spring: liberation from the tight cold of winter! Rebirth! On the full moon of Nisan - what happens? The festival of Pesach - Passover! -

If we understand the spiritual journey that begins in Nisan, we'll have some of the tools we need to understand Purim and the gifts and challenges this seemingly minor holiday brings.

So let's look at the month of Nisan first, and then come back to Adar and the festival of Purim.

The month of Nisan, the month of spring, is sometimes called the month of "speaking," because Passover is in this month, and the Hebrew for Passover is PESACH.

The rabbis extract a teaching from the word Pesach, which literally means to "pass over." But it happens that in Hebrew the verb *sach* means "to tell;" *peh* is "mouth." Thus Pesach, Passover, can also mean a "mouth that tells!"

And what a story we tell!

On the full moon of Nisan, we gather to share a Passover feast. Around the table we sing and tell the story of *Yitziat Mitzrayim*, the Exodus from Egypt.

Can you hear the TZR in *miTZRayim*. In Hebrew Egypt is not the name for the land in which we were enslaved, but *Mitzrayim*. TZR means constriction (like in Tsuris, for anyone here who might remember some Yiddish.)

TZR - The too-tight-place, the "Place where the life was being squeezed out of us." Our people's liberation from The-Place-of-Constriction is one of the great tales of human history, and also describes a challenge that life can bring to each one of us!

The telling is so important that the booklet of songs and stories read at a Passover seder, is called the [Hagada](#), which simply means "the telling!"

During [Pesach](#) God blazingly reveals God's Self to us as the ultimate liberating power, bringing us out of Mitzrayim, and then on to Sinai to covenant with us as a nation. With drama and a cast of thousands, God intervenes in history to liberate an oppressed people and bring us into freedom.

We escape from slavery, and trek into the wilderness of Sinai. At Sinai, God reveals God's Self to us with lightning and claps of thunder.

We receive Torah and learn to understand freedom in an entirely new way: freedom as commitment.

We will serve no ruler but God, the Infinite, Unitive, Sourcing Power of all Existence.

We hear the God-Force call to us: "Be holy, for I, the One Power that "Gods" you, am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)

We commit ourselves and all future generations to this striving: to be a holy people in a *brit olam*, an eternal covenant with the Creator of the Universe.

The walk from Mitzrayim to Sinai is a walk from liberation to commitment, from a rush to freedom to a deep purpose. It is a time of refinement, of preparation and openness to experiencing the revelation of God's active presence in our lives, in Torah, in Mitzvot...

The festival of [Shavuot](#) is a celebration of the revelation at Sinai! A fulfillment of the journey of liberation begun at Pesach; **A sacred time to stand again at Sinai, to open our hearts to the I AM of the universe, to receive Torah.**

Now here is an interesting point: If you remember the story of the Exodus, who was arguably the main hero? If you said Moses, you're right.

So it might surprise you, that in the traditional Hagadah, the "TELLING" that is recounted at the Passover Seder, Moses/Moshe is not mentioned at all! Who is center stage in The Telling? If you said "God" you're right. God is center stage! God is revealed! Moshe is not even mentioned.

Now, in order to go further, you need to know that just like at Pesach, when we tell the Exodus story by chanting the Hagadah, when we tell the story of Purim, we do this by chanting the Scroll of Esther, the Megillah of Esther.

The Megillah is the scroll that recounts the entire story of Queen Esther, her noble uncle Mordecai, the King Ahashverush and the villain Minister Haman.

In the tale, Mordecai learns of Haman's plot to destroy the Jewish villages of Persia and enrich himself with the booty. Mordecai's young niece Esther, who has through fate or fortune become King Ahashverus's new Queen, is the only possible person to thwart these evil plans.

She must, at great risk, disobey the laws that imprison her in "purdah," in the sex-segregated world of the Palace harem, to seek out the King and somehow turn aside this decree. With great faith and daring, she succeeds. Evil is overcome and goodness triumphs.

In the Hebrew Megillah of Esther, all the heroes have big roles. But one hero is missing. Surprise! God is not mentioned even once.

How strange that God does not appear in the Purim Megillah!

In the Hagadah, Moshe is not mentioned, and God is center stage. Moshe is concealed and God is revealed!

In the Purim Megillah God is so concealed that God does not appear even once.

Hmmm... Yet somehow, even so, when chant the Purim story we can feel God working. ..

In the Megillah of Esther God is like the hidden actor, whispering stage cues from behind the curtain, the main character who never gets a line or curtain call

What is this about?

If God is so very present, so revealed, at Pesach and at Shavuot, why is God absent at Purim?

Lets look:

Purim: a story of heroism and evil undone by goodness.

And also a holiday of masks: On Purim everyone wears costumes and masks. That is part of the celebration! Adults and kids, all come to the reading of the Megillah dressed in elaborate disguises! Purim is a Mardi Gras of disguises _ reality is hidden, garbed in funny, gaudy, attractive clever, glittery, cute, silly, but always false appearances.

It is a clue to the meaning of the holiday, and the story. Truth can be disguised. Sometimes even the main character is hidden. Sometimes even God is hidden.

So not surprisingly, we have to probe beneath the surface, past simple appearances, to find the real story of Purim. In fact, the disguises and the masks are all designed emphasize the theme of hiddenness! Look: This theme of concealment is found in the very name of the heroine of Purim. "Esther" derives from a Hebrew word that actually means "hidden."

... **God is NISTAR / hidden in the Purim story.**

To underscore the hiddenness of God, the entire story seems to be one of coincidences

- Queen Vashti just happens to refuse to appear at the royal feast;
- the king just happens to banish her and need a new queen;
- Mordecai just happens to be in the right place at the right moment to foil a plot against the king's life;
- the king just happens to have a sleepless night and his courtiers remind him that Mordecai saved his life;
- Even the date on which the Jewish villages are to be exterminated is determined by the casting of lots -- purim are the lottery (Esther 3:7) and it is this "pur" that gives us the name of the holiday.
- If there is any guiding hand of God, that hand is disguised in a string of seemingly random coincidences. In the Megillah, the role of God is unseen. God's presence is invisible.

Gradually we begin to understand the role of hiddenness in the Purim story. It is a story wrapped in a disguise, hidden behind a costume, concealed behind a mask.

Purim. What does this holiday ask of us? Purim asks us to look behind all masks and find the hidden truths.

Purim challenges us to confront all the false appearances that show up our lives and in our world, and to find evidence of the Presence of God even when this is not at all obvious.

Purim asks us: **What are the hidden realities, and what are the false appearances that hide them?**

Is there a core reality that even our ordinary, every-day habits of perception can mask?

How can we get locked into false assumptions and not really see what is going on?

In teaching us to look beneath appearances to the hidden truths, Purim is asking something rather difficult of all of us.

Purim asks us to look at our world and at our own lives and confront the biggest false appearance of all: The appearance that God absent, that God is not working through our lives.

You may know that there is an odd instruction that comes along with the holiday Purim: The Rabbis say that that we should get so drunk on Purim (*ad d'lo yada*) that we can't distinguish between *Baruch Mordechai*, Blessed be Mordechai and *Arur Haman*, Cursed is Haman.

Now they were certainly not encouraging alcohol abuse or gross drunkenness... so what were they saying...??

and anyhow . .

.. How could anyone be so "drunk to not know the difference between Yoda and Darth Vader or Mother Theresa and Stalin..?

Now here is where a Kabbalistic teaching is important.

Kabbalists often describe our material world as "*olam ha-p'ridah*" a world of separation and opposites -- of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, Blessing and Curse, young and old, this and that, us and them...

Yet they point out that the numerical value of the Hebrew letters that spell *Baruch Mordechai*, Blessed be Mordechai and *Arur Haman*, Cursed is Haman, are the same.

This does not mean there is no difference between good and evil, but rather calls us to a deeper understanding of how seeming polarities might actually intertwine.

Remember: Esther has to walk out of purdah, out of the sex-segregated harem, to find the King. To the kabbalists, walking beyond " the World of Purdah" - *olam ha-p'ridah*" is a journey towards *yichud*: the Divine Unity that underlies and transcends the apparent contradictions of our world, where even polarities like *Baruch Mordecai* and *Arur Haman* merge.

This is Esther's walk, and ours.

Esther's brave walk from "*purdah*," her separate women's abode, to approach the king reminds us what a risky venture it is to leave the comfort of everything we feel so sure about, all the comfortable appearances -- and aspire, through heightened consciousness, to experience however briefly, the expanse of Infinite Oneness, the chamber of yichud where false perceptions that disguise the oneness of all things fall away.

Purim asks us to challenge the foundational false appearance: that we, and everything, and everyone, are separate, segregated, not connected - that what happens to me won't affect you and that what happens to you won't affect me.

WE ARE connected. Deep in our hearts we know it. This is the truth to which religion is supposed to help us reconnect when we forge: God flows through everything and IS everything.

This is the real truth. We don't just interact. We inter-ARE!

[When pain and suffering happen, it is our shared pain. And when healing happens, and love flowers, this is our shared love.

In Torah, we are asked to love our fellow person as our self.

Samson Raphael Hirsch, a great rabbi, said

When we hear this it is as if we hear God saying:

"I am the personification of love.

I am the creating and vitalizing Source of all beings around you,

I have called them all, like you, to life and well-being.

Love My creation and all beings in it

Rejoice in their well-being, see in each My work, in each person My child...

Let everything you do reflect your love for the world, all creatures and people.

Carry love in your heart; it is this which makes you a human being. (Horeb. chap. 16)]

Just like the name Esther echoes the Hebrew word *nistar*, "hidden." Megillah sounds like the Hebrew for "revealed," *nigleh*.

So on Purim, on the full moon of Adar, we read the "Megillah" of "Esther" in order to begin *revealing* what is hidden! This "revealing" picks up speed, taking us to Pesach, and on to the wow-revelation of Sinai.

So friends, when Purim comes, lets celebrate! My hope for us is that we can see through the masks and begin to reveal the deepest truth. Lets peel of the masks; Lets see beyond our separateness and taste the Oneness! This is what God wants to reveal. The Infinite Loving Oneness of Being!

This is the journey from Purim to Pesach.

(Gratitude for inspiration and section on coincidences from The Holiday in Hiding: by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman))

