

March 21, 2008

Dear Friends,

Today, March 21, is the actual date of Purim for 5768. The main characters in the Book of Esther are annually portrayed in Purim plays (Purimshpiels) and in costumes at holiday celebrations. Yet, Prime Minister Haman, King Ahasuerus, one-time Queen Vashti, Queen Esther and Mordechai represent several types of people in any open and seemingly accepting country (which was actually Persia's real reputation in the ancient world) that might, at times, face significant challenges to basic societal values.

There was the Prime Minister Haman, who likely came to power without revealing the full scope of his egomania and his hatred of outsiders in his country. He thought he could impose his will on his people without consequence.

King Ahasuerus was the leader of a country that usually ran like "clockwork" (so historians say about Persia) who was oblivious to the insidious intentions of officials around him, but who was also willing to realize that he may have been wrong to trust his advisors so easily.

Vashti, with her refusal to attend part of a "men's" banquet where she didn't belong, protested the excesses of her country, a society that could have been, in her view, more enlightened.

Esther was placed in a situation which required her, at first, to hide her ethnic identity (perhaps Persia wasn't as open as it claimed to be) but which challenged her to speak out against the hatred (and violence) that was about to be perpetrated on her people. Mordechai was a loyal citizen (who uncovered an assassination plot on the King) who stood up for his own beliefs and urged his cousin Esther to do the same.

Hatred, acquiescence to the status quo, protest, standing up for what is right just at the right moment, and loyalty are traits that are found in almost any society or nation. This story, which is meant to offer us entertainment and enjoyment, also has great meaning for us at crucial times in national life as well as every day.

May the lessons of the Purim story inspire us to bring out the best in ourselves and our community! Happy Purim and Shabbat Shalom!

**-- L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.**