



My Dear Friends,

This will be a difficult Purim for me. I am still within the year of mourning for my father and stepping into Purim with all of its associations of joy and happiness feels discordant. It is uncomfortable for me to think about celebrating Purim in such an emotional state of loss. What is Purim supposed to mean for someone experiencing sadness?

This very personal question has compelled me to revisit the sources and re-think my understanding of Purim. In our tradition, Purim is associated with joy, but it is different from other chagim. For example, the holidays interrupt and cancel shiva and shloshim, unlike Purim where mourning continues.

For me, this distinction points to the very character of the day. The Jewish holidays are designed to remove us from our daily routines. Everything stops. We do not work or mourn. It is a day off from the quotidian and sometimes challenging world that we live in.

Purim, however, is different. Rather than removing us from the world, Purim is a time when we see the world as it truly is - with all of its jagged edges and contradictions. It's a world in which heroes and villains, like Mordechai and Haman, are confused. A world in which even after the redemption we remain citizens of Shushan and "servants of achashverosh." We do not say Hallel on Purim, the Talmud explains, because we still live in the world of Purim.



In this sense, Purim helps us experience joy even in a world of unredeemed imperfection. In his writings on Purim (Purim #30), Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner asks us to imagine a sick person battling an illness who eventually finds a cure. After recovery, that individual makes a seudas hoda'ah, a special meal to show appreciation to Hashem for overcoming this difficult challenge. Then Rabbi Hutner asks us to imagine someone whose sickness is that he is emotionally hindered from experiencing joy. This individual also makes a seudas hoda'ah upon recovery. But the happiness at such a celebration is different – it is the celebration of the very capacity to rejoice.

Purim, he writes, is a celebration of our capacity to rejoice even in a broken world. We do not pretend that all is perfect. We recognize and admit our mortality, limitations and losses. But we also recognize our gifts. We give mishloach manot and matanot le'evyonim reflecting our connections to friends and the support experienced in our communities. We read the story of Purim which unfolds without overtly mentioning God, and learn to discern Hashem's comforting presence in the subtexts of our lives. We are reminded that like Esther, we, too, can impact the grand story of our people, bringing redemption to the Jewish nation and spreading goodness throughout society. We are inspired by the way Mordechai ben Yair ben Shimi ben Kish not only celebrated and carried the names of his fathers with him throughout his life but also ensured the continuity of their legacy to the end of time.

It might not all be okay. Not every story has an immediate moment of happily-ever-after. But we have the capacity to rejoice. Purim is not a step away from real life, it embraces real life. And in life we can laugh amidst the tears, and we can smile even when there is a deep void and we can share a toast with our friends to the memory of the ones who we will always carry with us in our hearts.

My warmest wishes for a Purim filled with love,



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