



Yahadut Zmaneinu, Moreshet Ha'am

YOZMA

AN ISRAELI JEWISH INITIATIVE IN MODI'IN



From our Rabbis

Yesterday I was sitting in a café for a work meeting and we were served by a waiter with kitty cat ears and whiskers, and the coffee bar attendee had a top hat on her head and white gloves gracing her hands as she tap-danced her way to the coffee maker.

In Israel the celebration of Purim comes early on in the month of Adar and many Israelis get into the spirit. While we were going over our lesson plan for the B'not Mitzvah Mother and Daughter Group that meets weekly at the synagogue – eight women all dressed up in different colorful costumes sat down together at the table near us. Everyone in the café had a smile on their face when the women walked in laughing and hugging each other. The women clearly were in the spotlight much like the Purim story itself.

Purim is a national celebration in Israel and widespread among Jewish communities all over the world. It is also a time for raising awareness of the roles of women in our societies. *Megillat Esther* is a story of women making choices and facing the consequences of their decisions. The story begins with Queen Vashti, who refuses to bow to the King's whims and fancies in order to maintain her personal dignity and moves on to Haman's wife Zeresh, who advises her husband every step of the way on how to secure his status in the royal court and finally on to Esther and her amazing development as an independent woman, no longer just taking on the role of obedient niece and wife. Each woman in the story has a role to play and each one must make choices that will affect not only their lives but the lives of many others as well.

Vashti is willing to pay the price for refusing the King's bidding - losing her crown and position of power. Her choice allows her to not just maintain her personal dignity but to keep her sense of self and independence even at the cost of her royal status.

Zeresh is looking out for both her position and her husband's as she plots to help him achieve greatness by trampling the rights of others. She too pays a heavy price for her choices as they all backfire while her husband and sons all die at the gallows.

Esther is the most fascinating of all the women because she goes through an extraordinary transformation. She begins as a timid, insecure and immature character and grows right before the reader's eyes into a strong, committed and mature woman willing to take responsibility for her actions. She prepares herself with fasting and self-reflection and comes up with a dangerous and cunning plan to entrap her enemy. She is willing to risk her life to save the lives of her people.

It is worth your while to re-read the *Megillah* this year with an eye to the women of the story. As a result of my teaching the story in various settings with a deeper analysis of the female characters I have decided to fast for the first time on *Taanit Esther* – one of the traditional fast days in the Hebrew calendar. I fast this year to increase my awareness about the important empowerment of women. Even though I have attained status as a woman in a world that is still largely dominated by

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males, I am sensitive to the fact that many women across the globe are far from gaining their independence and learning the ways to empower themselves. I do not take for granted the gains we have made as Jewish women and pray that we will see the day when all women will have those opportunities.

Rabbi Barkin and the YOZMA community join me in wishing you all a joyous and empowering Purim!

Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon

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