

פּוֹרְיִם

שְׂמַחַת!

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## “Lots” to Talk About: What A Strange Name for a Holiday! By Bracha Osofsky

Everyone knows that the holiday of Purim is named for the *pur* – lots – that Haman cast to decide the day of the destruction of the Jews in Shushan.

But honestly - is that any name for a good Jewish holiday?

First of all, *pur* isn't even a Hebrew word. It's Assyrian. Which is probably why the megillah helpfully defines it for us: הוא הגורל , פור, - *Pur*, which is the lottery.

Second, look at the names of our other festivals. Pesach is named for an incredible miracle, when God passed – *pasach* – over Jewish homes and saved us from Egyptian oppression. Sukkot is named for the miraculous huts that housed us in the wilderness.

And Purim is named after the device that our enemy used to try and annihilate us? Does that really reflect the essence of the holiday?

Here are some possible answers.

**A spiritual explanation:** By casting a “pur” for his very significant decision, Haman demonstrated his Amalekite belief that chance rules the world. That completely negated the Jewish belief in Divine control. Amalek, and therefore Haman, rejected the idea that God utilizes the world for a Divine purpose; thus the very existence of the Jewish people was antithetical to their beliefs. Haman saw the cycles of history, and was aware that the Jews were at a spiritual low point, so he felt certain that he would be victorious. He would prove, by defeating the Jews, that a single person could control destiny.

But Purim celebrates the very fact that the world is not run by random chance. The holiday's name reminds us that even when events appear to be happening at random – like in a lottery - God is still the ultimate controller of fate.

**An archeological explanation:** Did the name Purim exist even before the Purim story actually happened? It's definitely possible. The ancient Assyrians named each year after a senior official in their kingdom. Shortly before the year began in the spring month that they called Nisanu (sound familiar?), they would choose the name of the year by casting ritual lots called *puru* in a spring festival. In fact, archaeologists have found a ceramic cube – a die – from 833 B.C.E., with an inscription stating that it is the *puru* of a chief treasurer named Yahalu.

It is possible that the holiday of *Puru* was eventually adopted by the Jews and interpreted as being a commemoration of an anti-Jewish incident that the Jews survived around that time of year. Or maybe *Puru* merged with a pre-existing celebration in commemoration of such an incident. There is textual evidence to suggest that the *psukim* explaining the holiday's name were edited into the megillah in order to make that connection. In true *v'nahafoch hu fashion*, it's possible that our megillah is

actually the only text which preserves the date of this Assyrian ritual and connects it with some sort of celebration.

**And a female empowerment version:** Maybe “pur” refers not only to Haman’s lottery, but to Esther’s bravery in taking action to try and annul Haman’s decree. To annul in Hebrew is לַהֲפֹךְ – and its root is פּוּר! So, by making the decision to speak up to Achashverosh, even at great personal risk, Esther turned Haman’s lottery on its head and saved her people.

Haman would certainly have wanted this holiday to be called Purim because of his lots. But in a true “vanahfoch hu,” what we remember is Esther’s bravery: not only in the megillah that bears her name, but in the name of the holiday itself.

### **“Bottoms Up” and Perceiving the Hidden as Revealed** by Chaya Greenberger

Although Megillah is one of the seven Rabbinic mitzvot, many halachic authorities designate it, along with the other mitzvot of Purim, as a “mitzva m’divrei kabbalah.” The latter is a higher status (in between a mitzva with “Torah” status and those of a Rabbinic nature) reserved for the mitzvot established by the prophets and delineated in the Tanach. It was Anshei K’nesset Hagedolah, a law-making body active in the early second temple period composed of prophets and sages (some say even including Mordechai himself), that authorized that incorporation of Megillah into the family of mitzvot. Both Talmudim (Bavli, Megillah 7a; Yerushalmi, Megillah 1:5) recount an initial controversy which emerged in this regard, due to theological concerns: The Torah with its 613 mitzvot was sealed and delivered by Moshe Rabbeinu the ultimate prophet. No other prophets are permitted to introduce new mitzvot. Additionally the argument was made, the Tanach cannot comprise additional recollections of the destruction of Amalek (i.e., Haman) as it was already thrice recorded in the Torah (twice, in Shemot and Devorim ) and the Prophets (once, Shmuel). Ergo, both canonization of Megillat Esther and the establishment of a commandment for its reading, were in jeopardy.

The Talmud Yerushalmi movingly relates that God himself intervenes “on behalf” of Purim, enlightening the sages with respect to a proof-text within the Torah itself which provides a halachic basis for its acceptance, within the books of the Tanach and the minyan mitzvot. The Talmudic discourse ends, moreover, with two declarations: the mitzva of Megillah stems directly from Sinai and it, along with the five books of Moses, will be the only parts of the Tanach to remain relevant in Messianic times. If this is not enough of an indication of the special status of Purim, the Midrash (Mishlei 9:2) maintains that Purim will be the only festival left to be observed into this utopian period. During the latter, the natural order of things will be utopic, and no extraordinary miracles will be necessary; the other chagim are a commemoration of the exodus of Egypt - the ultimate of extraordinary miracles, so they will no longer have a place. Purim, however, will become center stage as its essence is God’s providence as intertwined in the natural order of things.

A careful reading of the ninth chapter of Megillat Esther reveals that the celebration of Purim originated as a grass roots event the Jewish people orchestrated themselves upon their deliverance from Haman's plot. This was followed by Mordechai's ordinance that it be commemorated without fail on a yearly basis, throughout the generations and among all Jewish people the world over. The Megillah relates moreover, that Esther (with Mordechai's backing) issues a second ordinance to reinforce the first. The painstaking way in which the Megillah describes the establishment of Purim as a festival, the repetition of the words "lo Yaavoru" - they will be everlasting- and "zaram" - their children, to whom the mitzvah be passed on to, reflects the tenaciousness of Mordechai and Esther to commemorate the deliverance. It is most remarkable in this regard, that the root  $\text{קִיַּם}$ - to establish- appears seven times in the span of the 12 verses (Chapter 9: 20-32) which recount the ordinances sent out by Mordechai and Esther. This designates it as the major theme of the story- the solidification of Purim as a chag b'yisrael.

The question begs: why did Purim merit such special status, both in the eyes of God and in the eyes of man?

An attempt to answer this question takes us back to Sinai. The Midrash (brought in Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 84a) relates that God picked up mount Sinai and threatened: if you accept my Torah, all will be well, if not you will be buried underneath this mountain. Of the various interpretations of this Midrash and the attempt to put it into the context of the Israelites having already affirmed "Naase V'Nishma", two are relevant to our discourse. Tosfot maintains that despite their declaration, when the Israelites will come face to face with the fire, thunder and lightning, they might renege on their promise. God therefore picked up the mountain making it clear that there is no escape from their promise. According to this interpretation, fear was the prime motivator for their continued commitment. A figurative interpretation of the Midrash (offered by the Maharal) maintains that the coercion under the mountain is a metaphoric reflection of the sheer transparency of God's revelation- who can defy God and refuse his commandments in His very presence? Belief in God and acceptance of his commandments in the light of the ultimate miracles of Sinai, in which God descends to meet man, is a forgone conclusion. In any event, the commitment dissipated shortly thereafter with the golden calf.

The manner in which man meets God in the Purim story is the very antithesis of the Sinai experience. The Jewish people are in exile at the mercy of arbitrary rulers who drew an arbitrary lottery at their expense. They have no qualms about shedding their blood and would do so at whim. And yet, a series of "coincidences" bring about a grand deliverance. Piece by piece, the players (Ahashverosh, Haman, and others) play into the hands of Divine providence as God "plays" with them. Mordechai and Esther take the necessary personal risks and involve the people in fast and prayer, beseeching Divine Providence. An important point here is that we are looking at the whole story as told in the Megillah. Seeing the total picture, the hand of providence is more apparent to us. But for the Jewish people in Shushan, aside from Mordechai and Esther who were privy to all the events, it was an agonizing period of hester panim which resolved only at the end of the story. Nevertheless, they saw the deliverance as the hidden hand of God. The "people's chag", with the support of Mordechai and

Esther, became a mitzvah. This was a mitzvah that came out of love for God and appreciation, which the Jewish people showed by making an offering. Not a sacrificial lamb, but a mitzvah! Bottom's up and V'nahapoch hu! Instead of mitzvot coming down from Sinai the mitzvot of Purim were offered up to God from Persia for acceptance. As we saw, God accepted and embraced the offering.

The Talmud (Bavli, Pesachim 84a) maintains that the words **קיימו וקבלו** that appear in the Megillah (chapter 9: 27) ostensibly as a reference to the Jewish people in Persia taking upon themselves the establishment of Purim, intimate on a deeper level, the establishment or solidification of what was previously accepted. The Torah itself was reaccepted anew (**קיימו מה שקבלו**) but this time (unlike at Sinai) voluntarily not coercively. In a similar vein, the Rebbe of Chabad interprets the words **קבלו אשר החלו לעשות** (Megillat Esther, 9: 23 ) which on its face are a reference to the acceptance of the first Purim celebration for future generations, as relating to the first acceptance of the Torah on Sinai. The verse thus comes to mean that the Jewish people clinched the acceptance of the Torah which was initially but incompletely accepted on Sinai.

The Talmud (Bavli, Yuma 29a) cites a Midrashic interpretation for the words **לא יסוף מזרעם**, (Megillat Esther, 9:28 ) which on its face refers to the festival of Purim being a celebration for all generations to come. On an additional plane the words indicate that Purim is the omega of miracles, that is, the saga of miracles cannot be ended (**לא יסוף**) until it includes Purim . Think of how our children use the term **סוף הדרך** in their slang. Sinai stands at one pole of miracles, with its full divine revelation whereas Purim is situated at the other pole, with no apparent revelation. Yet it is the “last word” on miracles and perhaps the most important. During periods of hester panim, the Jewish people can draw strength and insight from the Purim experience, cultivating the belief that divine providence hovers over us all the time, peaking out to surprise us when most unexpected. Esther insisted this message be read out loud every year from a written scroll and be written into the canonized text of the Tanach, as the “last word” on miracles, without which it would be lacking a critical element in Jewish thought.

### **Purim Game of Numbers** by Marcia Goldlist

Below are 10 prompters. Guess what each one has to do with Purim. (All have some number related to them) - you can find hints on page 7 and the answers on page 12.

1. square
2.  $\frac{1}{2}$
3.  $\frac{1}{6}$
4. Triangle
5. Sukkot
6. 18x3
7. First Prize
8. Sarah Imenu
9. 18x10
10. Megillat Esther

## And who knows ? ומי יודע ? by Rochelle Bukatman Tropp

Persia is described in מגילת אסתר as a society in which laws are regarded as דת and cannot be changed and in which fate is predetermined. The word דת appears no fewer than 17 times in מגילת אסתר. There are laws governing all sorts of behavior - from drinking to relationships between spouses to the garments worn at court. King Achashveirosh consults יודעי דת ודין - יודעי העתים... wise men who know how to divine which times are suited for various activities, who know about law and judgment. Haman has lots (פורים) cast in order to determine what date is most propitious for the massacre of the Jews and then sends out דת להנתן - פתשגן הכתב - an irreversible legal document ordering that the massacre be done on that date.

When Mordechai informs Esther of this decree and tells her to appeal to the king to rescind it, her initial response is that of a proper Persian. She reminds him of the law that 'everyone knows' - namely, that anyone who approaches the king without having been summoned will be killed אחת דתו - (except for rare exceptions) and that it has been 30 days since she has been summoned. The time is not right and the דת does not permit.

Mordechai then speaks several critical sentences. First, he warns Esther against thinking that she can escape the fate of her nation; if she is silent at this time, the Jews will find deliverance in some other way but she and her family will perish.

The words Mordechai uses to caution Esther against remaining silent (אם החרש תחרישי) echo several other texts in תנ"ך. The one I want to highlight is the scene in which the Israelites, caught between the Egyptian army and the sea, are told די ילחם לכם ואתם תחרישון - God will fight for you and you should be silent. In contrast to that time, Mordechai warns Esther against being silent at this time אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת because this time the enemy is Amalek. Beginning with our nation's first encounter with Amalek who attacked them very shortly after the miraculous splitting of the sea, the Israelites are not to stand silently by but to fight back. Their army succeeds with the help of Moses raising his arms and, of course, the help of God. The command was then given to continue to fight Amalek in every generation.... and Haman is the Amalekite of their generation.

Mordechai then states למלכות הגעת כזאת לעת אם יודע ומי יודע? "Who knows whether it is for this time that you attained your royal position?"

This is an extremely un-Persian remark. Unlike those יודעי העתים, Mordechai makes no claim to know whether this is the time that Esther can effectively use her position, whether she will even survive the attempt to approach the king. The chances are very slim. But perhaps... Who knows? Fate is fluid. No one can know for sure. Perhaps she can succeed.

This is not only an extremely un-Persian remark; it reflects, in fact, a particularly Jewish attitude. When Esther agrees to accept her mission, she orders communal fasting for three days after which she will approach the king though it is against the law לא כדת - אשר - stating, וכאשר אבדתי אבדתי, "If I perish, I perish". This phrase is an echo of Yaakov's statement when he agrees to send his beloved son Binyamin to Egypt. Although the risk to Binyamin is significant, Yaakov agrees that it is a risk that he must take for the sake of the rest of the family. He says, וכאשר שכלתי שכלתי, "If I am bereaved, I am

bereaved.” Esther, like Yaakov, recognizes that her actions involve a tremendous risk and yet she, too, proves willing to act on behalf of the nation and to accept the consequences whatever they may be.

One irreverent parenthetical observation: This willingness to do the right thing despite great risk always reminds me of the scene in Lord of the Rings in which Gimli the dwarf says, “Certainty of death? Small chance of success? What are we waiting for?” (Was he Jewish?)

One more reverent observation: amidst the exultation that is felt at the ‘נהפוך הוא’ in which the plans of Haman are overturned and Mordechai is elevated to replace him at court, the end of the megillah notes the seemingly extraneous irrelevant fact that the king placed a tax on the land; it reminds us ominously of the last record of a Jew becoming *משנה למלך* and taxes being levied. After the death of Yosef who had been second-in-command in the court of Pharaoh, Pharaoh began levying taxes on the Israelites- *מסים- שרי עליו שרי* – as the first step toward their enslavement. Despite the unexpected triumph and reversal of fate in the story of the megillah, the megillah adds a discordant note.

Rav Soloveichik was known to say there were two holidays that we Jews can never celebrate properly. The first is Yom Kippur, which should be a time of joy because of the possibility of forgiveness. Yet we are aware of how much we need that forgiveness and of the directive of *ועניתם את נפשותיכם* - to refrain from eating and other pleasures. The Talmud therefore instituted the *סעודה מפסקת*, a festive meal before the start of the fast, which lends the time a celebratory character despite the *עינוי*. The second such holiday is Purim. We celebrate the triumph of the Jews with feasting, drinking, gifts to friends and to the poor.... and yet there is a second character to the day. It is a day in which we recognize that we are not in control, that we are vulnerable, that Amalek exists in each generation. In fact, the siddur of Rav Amram Gaon included the saying of *תחנון* on Purim. While it is not our practice to say *תחנון*, we do have *תענית אסתר*, a day of fasting leading into the holiday. We are reminded that we are vulnerable but still must celebrate, that we live in a world of risk but still try to do the right thing.

### **Purim Game Hints** by Marcia Goldlist

These hints go with the game on page 5. The answers are on page 12.

1. What makes a square?
2. One out of two
3. One out of five
4. What makes a triangle?
5. The four species
6. What happens 54 times in Megillat Esther?
7. This happens for the first time in Megillat Esther.
8. How old was Sarah when she died?
9. What lasted 180 days?
10. Party Esther

***Avoid the Slippery Slope: Save the Men!!*** by Bracha Zuriel

Megilat Esther tells the story of how Vashti, the queen, is summoned by her drunken husband, King Ahasuerus to appear at the banquet and she refuses. Despite his stupor, he realizes that this is an affront to the King and he calls his closest advisors to consult on what to do with the obstinate queen!

One of the wise advisors, Memuchan, points out that this refusal of the queen is not just a sin against the king but could impact the entire kingdom. As soon as women hear about this act, they will immediately scorn their husbands, despise them, not obey their husbands' word and STOP COOKING DINNER. Total anarchy could prevail!!! Memuchan advises the slightly sobered king to do away with Vashti and send out an *irrevocable* edict that women must be subservient to their husbands!!

This may be the first *slippery slope* regarding women stated in the Tanach. Memuchan here states that just *hearing* what happened with Vashti will cause ALL the women of the kingdom to rebel against their husbands and would bring no less than the decline of the 127 province kingdom!!! Oy vavoy!!

The *slippery slope* concept is particularly important regarding women since they seem to have a propensity for taking the slightest weakening of stricture to a place of TOTAL letting go of the system.

We can surely identify today with this *slippery slope* concept in Judaism regarding women. We know that if a woman's fingertip is visible this could cause every man in her vicinity to have a melt down and go out to "evil ways".

Is it not true that if a woman spoke inside a synagogue to a mixed audience, the men would immediately storm the bima or worse?!?

Women dancing with a Sefer Torah on Simchat Torah (behind a mechitza) would surely lead them to other unspeakable wayward activity.

Although Memuchan is identified by the Gemara as Haman, as women we must give him his due for identifying the *slippery slope* and keeping Jewish society together for so many generations. And let us say Amen. 😊

## **I Meant What I Said and I Said What I Meant – to YOU** by Shahar Loshinsky

I first thought of calling this piece “A word is worth a thousand pictures,” but I was afraid you would say – No, it’s not.

Truthfully, though, if there’s one thing we’ve learned from a year of less hugging and more talking, of facial expressions hidden behind masks – all year and not just on Purim, it’s that choosing our words carefully is even more important nowadays when we have to rely less on body language and other non-verbals. As anyone who has been communicating on Zoom or WhatsApp video can attest, it is so much harder to decipher nuance when you can only see someone from the neck up. And it’s even harder when you can’t see the person at all.

Albert Mehrabian, a professor of psychology and expert in non-verbal communication, explained that the impact of a message is determined by many factors, including words, tone, and body language. The “Mehrabian 7-38-55 Rule” posits that 7 percent of meaning is communicated through the spoken word, 38 percent through tone of voice, and 55 percent through body language.

Words, it turns out, affect us the least. Notice that when there is a conflict between the verbal and non-verbal message – we believe the non-verbal, assuming it to be more honest.

Imagine you’re interviewing someone who says they’re confident they would do the job well. While telling you all the reasons they should be hired, they are fidgeting, shaking their leg, tapping a surface with their fingers, playing with their hair... Would you hire them?

Non-verbals add the spice to our message. They create the impact, the emotional tone, and much more.

But now what? What are we to do with all this social-distancing, and communicating from the neck up – at best?

The answer is in Megillat Esther.

There’s a lot of emphasis in Megillat Esther on letters, scribes, letter-writing, and couriers. The Megillah itself is “ha’iggeret hazot”, this letter. We read that the letters are written: “ואל עם ועם כלשוננו” - to every nationality according to its language (Esther 1 and later almost the same in 8).

There are several interpretations of this phrase, among them - that each letter was written in the language of its intended reader, or that the deliverers knew how to translate the letter to the language of the country receiving the letter (R’ Yosef Karo). That would explain why even the delivery of the letter was painstakingly planned and the deliverers get honorable mention. Because - it is not only the content of the letter that is important.

In actual fact, it’s just not enough to say what you mean and mean what you say.

Communication is an interactive process of sending and receiving messages. We do this verbally and non-verbally, through speaking, text messages, video-chats, gestures, emojis, and much more. In a perfect world, the message received by the recipient would be identical to the message sent. But it's not. Between the message sender and the recipient there is "interference" in the form of thoughts, emotions, expectations, needs and more.

Effective communication takes place when the sender phrases their message and delivers it with the recipient in mind. Sort of – customizing the message to the target audience. Does doing so negate the chances for misunderstanding? Unfortunately not, because the sender cannot predict how the recipient will interpret the message. But by "speaking the language" of the recipient and ensuring the delivery encounters a minimum of interference, we do our utmost to get our message across, as emphasized in the Megillah.

May we soon return to a life of unmasked smiles.

But even when we do, we should retain the practice of choosing our words carefully for the person on the other end of our message.

### **Commemorating Miraculous Rescues with a "Second Purim"** by Channa Coggan

Thirty-four years ago, I severely broke my ankle in a work accident. As the accident occurred outdoors, an hour before dawn, there was nobody to whom I could call for help. I began crawling towards the home of some friends. Suddenly, a man appeared, walking in my direction. Upon hearing my calls for help, he assisted me to my friends' apartment. It was one week before Rosh Hashana and he was on his way to synagogue – an hour earlier than usual – to pray *slichot* at the dawn minyan. Every year on Yud-Bet B'Elul, the anniversary of this event, I make a "Second Purim" celebration in commemoration of my providential rescue.

The "First" Purim, of course, is the Purim we all celebrate in the month of Adar, which tells the story of the Persian Jewish community's miraculous deliverance on March 31, 357 BCE from the hands of evil Haman. The decree established by Queen Esther and Mordechai to make Yud-Dalet B'Adar "a day of rejoicing, feasting and distribution of gifts for all generations," became a model throughout the centuries for all other Jewish communities. Hence, any miraculous rescue, such as from oppressive edicts, murderous pogroms or even natural disasters, came to be commemorated with a "Second Purim."

Sometimes a Second Purim falls during the month of national mourning (*Av*), such as the Purim of Ibrahim Pasha, co-called because the Turks from the army of the Egyptian General Ibrahim Pasha rescued the Jews of Hebron. Sometimes they fall on holidays, as with Purim Carpentras, the anniversary of the saving of the French Jewish community of Carpentras in 1651 from a blood libel on

the eighth day of Pesach. Moreover, sometimes they fall on Purim itself, such as Purim Rhodes, when Sultan Abd-El-Magid saved the Jewish community of this Greek island from a massacre in 1840.

Sometimes a special Megillah was composed to celebrate the Second Purim. One of the most famous of them all, the "Hitler Megilla", was composed in honor of Hitler Purim, Kaf B'Kislev, by the Jewish community of Casablanca, North Africa, following their deliverance from the Nazi invaders in 1942. The Megilla reads, "...and the month which was turned for us from sorrow to rejoicing and the making of holiday and the giving of gifts to the poor. Cursed be Hitler, cursed be Mussolini..."

Some record the rescue from natural disasters, such as Purim Paduva (1795) when the Jewish community in Paduva, Italy, was saved from a great fire. Others record examples of personal bravery such as Purim Chios, also known as Purim de la Señora (1595 or 1820 – the date is disputed), where a Jewish woman saved the day by blowing up an ammunition depot with a red-hot baker's shovel. The explosion frightened the invading army, allowing resident Turks to rise up and defeat them.

Still others record the power of prayer, such as Purim Sharif (also known as "False Purim" to distinguish it from the "true" Purim in Adar), celebrated on Kaf-Dalet B'Tevet by the Jews of Tripoli. According to the *Otzar Yisrael*, (Tel Aviv, 1916), in 1705, the commander of the Tunisian army announced he would lay siege and kill everyone in Tripoli. Following days of prayer led by the city's chief rabbis, a plague of pestilence spread through the attacking troops and the siege was broken.

Some days of Second Purim mark the saving from death of worthy individuals. One of the most well known of these is the Purim of Rabbi Avraham Danzig. Rabbi Danzig was a scholar and poet. On Tet-Vav B'Kislev 1803, a huge explosion in a military camp located near the rabbi's house rocked the area. While the blast destroyed the neighborhood, killing or injuring many people, the rabbi's house was undamaged and its occupants unharmed.

No discussion of Second Purim commemorations would be complete without a mention of the infamous "New Haman," Vincent Fettmilch, who terrorized the Jews of Frankfurt-au-Main in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The year was 1614 and Vincent, a baker, organized attacks on the city's Jews. Following a battle that lasted a day and a half, Vincent's mob forced the Jews to surrender. Vincent expelled the Jews from the city, demanding they leave all their belongings behind.

The emperor of Germany, upon learning of the outrageous injustice done to the Jewish community, ordered the baker hanged and quartered, his house razed to the ground, and the Jews of Frankfurt returned to their homes with full honors. The story of Vincent Fettmilch's crimes and of his punishment were inscribed in German and Latin on a column erected on the site of his house. Community rabbis proclaimed a "Purim Winz" on Kaf B'Adar, complete with a special fast and penitence. Rabbi Elhanan Ha'elen composed a "Vincent Megillah" in Hebrew and Yiddish.

Although little evidence of these Second Purims remain today, Israeli and diaspora communities established hundreds of them throughout the ages. As one of the mitzvot of Purim is "to remember

what Amalek did to you," I think it behooves us to keep a record of these special Second Purim commemorations.

### **Game Answers** by Marcia Goldlist

Game prompters are on page 5 and hints on page 7.

1. There are 4 mitzvot for Purim (mishloach manot, matanot l'evyonim, reading the megillah and participating in a seudah)
  - a. Another possible answer is that Achashverosh searched 4 years for a queen
2. Megillat Esther is one out of two books in the Tanach which don't mention God. The other book is Song of Songs.
3. Megillat Esther is one of five megillot in the Tanach. (The others are Song of Songs, The Book of Ruth, the Book of Lamentations and Ecclesiastes.)
4. The fast of Esther was 3 days.
5. Hadassah was Esther's Hebrew name. On Sukkot we use the 4 species. The Hebrew for myrtle, which is used in the lulav, is hadas.
6. The name of Haman appears 54 times in the megillah. (It is also the number of letters spelling out the names of Haman's 10 sons as well as the number of words in the Al HaNisim prayer which we say on Purim.)
7. Mordechai is the first person known to be referred to as a Jew (instead of an Israelite or a Hebrew).
8. Achashverosh ruled over 127 countries.
9. Achashverosh's party in Shushan lasted 180 days.
10. The megillah is read twice - in the evening and in the morning and Esther had two parties to which she invited Achashverosh and Haman.

## A Little Geula Game by Esther Cameron

First, a poem:

### THE HARES ON JUDGMENT DAY

In memory of Peter Kropotkin

The hares... cannot live without coming together for play.

-- Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution

To the great forest came a dog.  
He said the Lord had sent him  
To tell the creatures of the wild:  
"Tomorrow the world is ending.

"The measure of man's sin is full,  
They've made His existence a burden.  
Prepare yourselves as best you can –  
At noontide falls the curtain."

The lion bowed his head in thought.  
He made a proclamation:  
"All animals shall meet at dawn  
In solemn convocation."

Throughout the night the animals  
Were moving through the wood,  
Till in a central clearing wide  
They all assembled stood.

As the sun rose the lion spoke:  
"Who here can find a way  
To turn aside G-d's wrath?" None there  
Had anything to say

Until at last the monkey piped:  
"Let's try fasting and praying  
For mercy!" "That's what humans do –  
Does it help them?" jeered the Raven.

"If I could only get a word  
In private with the Lord,  
My shrewdness even on high, I ween,  
Some counsel would afford.  
"You, brother Eagle, to such heights,  
I hear, are wont to soar."

The eagle sighed: "Though high I flew,  
I never found the door."

Then spoke the hare: "It's plain to see  
That we are at wit's end;  
So we propose, in Heaven's name,  
These hours in play to spend.

Then all the hares, both young and old,  
Began their merry dance;  
They well knew how to leap and bow,  
To caper, hop, and prance.

The animals stood round and gazed,  
Forgetting care and sorrow,  
The sun climbed up and shone as bright  
As on Creation's morrow.

The good Lord looked into the world.  
The hares at play he sighted  
Within the peaceful circle there –  
My, but he was delighted!

Upon this play so fine and free  
His eyes he could not sate.  
The minutes passed, the hours passed,  
Till it was getting late.

The noonday hour was gone, and still  
He was not tired of seeing.  
"Well, well," he said at last, "I guess  
The world can go on being."

So hear: even if the time grows dark  
And many storms beset it,  
Whoever still can find a spark,  
The world will not regret it.

\*\*\*

A bit of background:

I first read about Kropotkin in "The Meridian," a speech given by Paul Celan, a Jewish poet and Holocaust survivor whose work has greatly influenced my life, and the "Meridian" speech in particular has been a kind of lodestar. Celan states in this speech that he "grew up with the works of Peter Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer." (Landauer was a socialist thinker who opposed the materialism of Karl Marx.) So I looked them up. Kropotkin was the author of *Mutual Aid: A Factor of*

*Evolution*, which combats the Darwinian theory of "survival of the fittest" which is often invoked to justify ruthlessness. Kropotkin argues instead that those species whose individuals help each other are most likely to survive and evolve. The book contains many interesting anecdotes of animal life, like the one about the hares.

"The Hares on Judgment Day" is a translation of a poem I wrote in German in the 1980's, in Jerusalem, for a circle of German-speaking immigrants from Europe, some of whom had known Paul Celan (then Paul Antschel) before the war. In going back to the poem I realized how much it is rooted in the "Meridian" speech. The meridian – a word derived from the Latin word for "noon" -- is the line that connects the points on earth from which the sun is at the zenith at a given time. The poem reflects Celan's sense of an ultimatum and yet also a lightness that sometimes surprises, especially at the end of "The Meridian."

The original is one of my favorites among my own poems, and for a long time I despaired of translating it. But a few weeks ago someone wrote to me that while my poems were of a kind he didn't generally like, being ideological and agenda-driven, there was a saving lightness about them. Energized by this comment, I proceeded to translate the poem first into Hebrew, and then into English. The form is more perfect in the original – the stanzas were rhymed abab – and contained the word *Tierkreis*, which means not only "circle of animals" but also "Zodiac," which gave the thing more of a cosmic dimension. But one friend reassures me that some of the fun still comes through.

#### AGENDA: A LITTLE GEULA GAME

Of course, I had an agenda in translating the poem and have one in sharing it now. For many years I have been trying to persuade people to engage in a little game one might call "putting the world back together." It has had a few trials, and these have helped me to work on and refine the rules. In their present version, the rules are posted at <https://www.derondareview.org/geulagame.pdf>.

As I put it in a poem a few years ago:

..... If the world turns upside down  
 even for a moment this next full moon of Adar  
 maybe someone else, somewhere, will think it could happen.

## Diary of a Jewish Girl by Golda Warhaftig

Dear Diary,

From today onward, I'll share my thoughts and feelings with you. Since being exiled from Yerushalayim and wandering from place to place, our people are now settled in Shushan, the capital of Persia. Although I was born here and didn't have the privilege to be born in "the good Land," I feel a sense of sadness that hangs over our home in the shadow of the Galut.

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה וְשָׂמוֹ מֵרְדֵּכַי בֶּן יֵאִיר בֶּן-שְׁמַעִי בֶן-קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי. אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם  
עַם-הַגְּלוּת אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִתָּה עִם יְכִנְיָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה -- אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.

My uncle Mordechai constantly mourns the Galut, on an individual, on a national, on a universal and on a cosmic level. He has left an empty space on the wall, at the entrance of our home, upon which is written,

...אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני

Many of our people maintain that it must be very exciting to be living in a capital, such as London, Paris or Shushan. These are cities that bubble with events, colour and carnivals, airs of elegance. Women with feathers and finery grace the grounds of the royal palaces. Rumour has it that here in Shushan, wine flows like a river from one courtyard to another. Uncle Mordechai is not impressed. He is deeply concerned with the consequences of Jews assimilating with their gentile neighbours

Tuesday

Dear Diary,

Perhaps I'm overprotected. Uncle Mordechai doesn't approve of my spending time outside. He says that there are undesirable people out there. Anti-Semitism is ingrained in the fabric of the Persian society and although it hasn't yet surfaced, it could easily be reignited.

One of my friends affirmed that at the feast for the citizens of Shushan, many Jews were present and, oh my gosh, Achashverosh, the king, had the audacity to appear before his guests in the robes that the "Kohen Hagadol" wore when serving in the Bet Hamikdash. How utterly devastating.

Thursday

Dear Diary,

There are days when I feel so sad and lonely. Uncle Mordechai is gentle, loving and caring. He takes great care of me and worries for my future. But Diary, no one can take the place of a parent. My father died while my mother was pregnant. I cannot begin to imagine how my mother dealt with the loss of the love of her life. In my mind's eye, I see my parents discussing names. Without doubt they had great expectations of me. Had I been a boy, perhaps they would have called me, Binyamin, in

memory of "Sabba Binyamin" and if a girl, as I turned out to be, I was to be named Hadassah, a fragrant smelling plant, as the "Tsadikim" that spread pleasant smelling scents upon those whose lives they touch.

But then, tragedy struck again. Mother died in childbirth. Sometimes I feel guilty over this. I ask myself, "Why my life over hers?" I know that this is irrational but I am only human. In fact this pains me so much that I am unable to speak about it, I prefer to hold my tongue. If I venture to bring this out in the open, then perhaps I will convince myself that it is true.

There are other "girly" matters that I've needed to discuss but haven't been able to raise them with Uncle Mordechai.

Motzei Shabbat Kodesh

Dear Diary,

This Shabbat I persuaded Uncle Mordechai to tell me of my royal lineage. He is usually very busy, heading the Sanhedrin and seeing to the needs of our community. This Shabbat, after a delicious Shabbat meal, he shared stories of our ancestors.

Sabbah Shaul was chosen to be the first king of Israel. What a great honour. He was tall and handsome, but more important than his external features were his inner qualities. He excelled in modesty. He was so humble that after he was appointed king by the prophet, Shmuel, he didn't rush to announce the news over the media.

Uncle Mordechai also shared with me the grave mistake that Shaul made by saving the life of Agag, the king of Amalek. For this sin, the Kingdom was torn away from him. It isn't always easy to know when to be cruel and when to be kind. But sometimes one has to be cruel in order to be kind. This is something that I must make sure to remember

Monday

Shalom Diary,

I've been pondering over the Shabbat stories that Uncle shared with me. It seems to me that there is an affinity between my ancestor Binyamin and me. Rachel, his mother, the paradigm of modesty and humility, died in childbirth. She obviously knew that she was about to die as the midwife tells her not to be afraid. I wonder whether my mother was afraid for the same reason? Perhaps what went through her mind at that moment was concern for who would raise me. Rachel called her son, "Ben Oni", the son of my affliction. Yaacov changed the name to Binyamin, the son of my right hand, [strength]. How could he march through life, bearing the name, Ben Oni? Maybe somewhere in his core being, he carried that name as well. Perhaps the screaming silence that characterized him was his way of dealing with his life's ordeals. He bore the burden of being an orphan under similar circumstances to mine, and although his father was still alive, Yaacov's energies were focused on

Yosef. Yosef is referred to as "ben zekunim," despite Binyamin being the younger. After the selling of Yosef, Yaacov was partially not alive. Binyamin knew that Yosef had been sold as a slave, but he had been sworn to secrecy. His gem on the breastplate is named "Yoshpeh," meaning "there is a mouth," and yet Binyamin remained silent. He contained himself for twenty-two years, pained, deprived, insulted, angry and perhaps fearful that if his brothers could be so cruel once, then they could repeat it again. Binyamin was silent but each of his ten sons is named in memory of his lost brother. The ability to maintain silence was inherited from his mother Rachel, and probably my ability to keep a secret is also inherited from Rachel.

Similarly, I was endowed with a second name, Esther. In Persian it means "star." To be quite frank with you, Diary, I don't feel very much like a star and these two names have caused a little anguish regarding my identity. Am I Rivka or Margaret, am I Janice or Sarah?

Dear Diary,

Things have been so chaotic here that I haven't had time to correspond. Queen Vashti was overthrown and I was forced to marry the king. I have lost my external freedom but no one can take away my inner freedom. I shall preserve my G-dly dignity. It is He who knows the inner mechanisms of our being. I shall continue to remain silent until I choose the right time to challenge those who wish to destroy us either physically or spiritually. My beloved parents, I vow that I will not disappoint you.

Erev Pesach

Dear Diary,

My maidservant tells me that Mordechai is sobbing incessantly outside the palace and that he has torn his clothes. And yet the Jews living in Shushan are embarrassed at his reaction.

„והעיר שושן נבוכה,,

They were initially sure that if a decree had been decreed against the Jews, it wasn't referring to them. After all, first and foremost they are Persians (Germans) and only afterwards are they Jews. They maintain that they are integrated into Persian society. I sent clothes to Mordechai by way of telling him that the time is not yet ripe for revelation. Mordechai returned a message that I must speak up, reveal who I am and plead for my people. Timing is vital and therefore I made it clear that I will give up that which is most precious to me on the condition that Am Yisrael unite in prayer and fast. This is my finest hour, the tables have turned and from being a painful passive orphan, being guided by my elders, I take charge, speak up and instruct my elders. "And Mordechai carried out all the instructions of Esther."

Adar

Dear Diary,

I have sacrificed my entire life in order to save our people from annihilation. These days have become days of celebration, days when we hold feasts, exchange food gifts and take care of the poor. These days of celebration will be with us for eternity. Yes, that was my finest hour. The hour where I had clarity of mind to know that not only do I have the obligation to save our people but the opportunity to rectify the transgression of my grandfather Saul who preserved the life of Agag, king of Amalek.

Dear Diary,

ליהודים הייתה אורה ושמחה

But as far as I am concerned

כאשר אבדתי, אבדתי

I am a lost soul.