

BH. PURIM TWEETS (& ideas to share) by Mendel Rubin – for Campus Shluchim Shiur – Sunday, Tetzaveh 5780

The #Mishna says "one who reads the #Megillah backwards has not fulfilled the obligation." Why would someone do that? #BaalShemTov interprets backwards as back in time, as one who sees #Purim as old ancient history. We ought to see it as current, up to date & personally relevant!

HOW WE CELEBRATE PURIM

I don't like the #Purim = Jewish Halloween analogy. Yes, both have treats and costumes but on Purim the Mitzvah is to give gifts of food, not take (certainly not trick). And as #MonstersInc eventually learns, #Purim gets its energy from joy & laughter not frights & scares.

Why costumes on #Purim? Queen Esther concealed her identity. Even G-d is concealed, as the #Megillah is the only book of the Jewish Bible where G-d's name is never mentioned. #Rebbe says goal is to peel away the layers, reveal the concealed: #Megillah = reveal, Esther = conceal.

On every Jewish festival, Rambam/Maimonides cautions us to ensure others who are less fortunate shouldn't be left out, but especially on #Purim there's a Mitzvah observance to give charity to the poor. In fact, its more intrinsic to #Purim than #Hamantasch, #gragger or costumes.

#MishloachManot is one of #Purim's Mitzvah observances, mentioned right in the #Megillah: 2 items of ready-to-eat food as a gift to at least 1 friend on Purim Day. Some make it very elaborate with themes and all, but the minimum of any 2 foods is fine, too.

One purpose of #MishloachManot gifts of food is to ensure that others have something with which to enjoy their #Purim feast (another Purim Day Mitzvah observance) and in this way, all of our individual Purim feasts are somehow intertwined and interconnected!

PURIM = LOTTERY

The #Purim holiday is named for #Haman's lottery to determine the date of his planned annihilation of the Jews. Isn't that lottery incidental to the bigger story? Why name the whole holiday after that (seemingly) trivial (and negative) aspect?

#Rebbe explains that lottery (chance beyond our control) reminds us of higher supernatural or suprarational forces at play even in a natural logical story like the #Megillah of palace intrigue where it all seems to fall into place naturally.

#Haman's use of lottery in the #Purim story to determine date of his planned Jewish annihilation also demonstrates the irrationality of #Antisemitism, its evils lurk far deeper than any "reasons" given, like a lottery it makes no sense.

PURIM'S PHYSICALITY

There's a beautiful visual teaching from the Bnei Yissachar, Rebbe Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, differentiating between the handles of a #Chanukah #Dreidel (spinning toy) held from above = supernatural, while a #Purim #Gragger (noisemaker) is held from below = within nature.

"They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat!" is a joke said about a lot of Jewish holidays but especially of #Purim where threat was more physical than spiritual, against Jewish body not soul, like Hitler #Haman hated Jews not Judaism. So festive meal & gifts of food honors that.

#AlterRebbe says this demonstrates Jewish steadfast sacrifice all year until #Purim. So #Haman isn't exactly same as Hitler (whose hate for the Jew was to an even further extreme). Still, Haman was after the Jewish body, unlike #Chanukah which was against the soul.

Quite a few of #Rebbe's Chassidic discourses explore advantages of miracles encloded & hidden within nature (like the #Purim story) over the mind-blowing earth-shattering open & obvious type of miracles like in the #Passover #Exodus. It seems to be big issue for #Rebbe.

INSIDE THE STORY

#Rebbe notes that #Mordechai & #Esther of the #Purim story were both highly connected in the palace before #Haman's evil decree kicked in. Yet their 1st response to the threat was prayer, repentance, gathering & fasting before any political maneuvers or strategic intercession. >

This is especially true of #QueenEsther. If she was relying on her charm & grace to sway the king, why would she commit to 3 days of fasting? That certainly wouldn't make her more physically appealing to a king that made beauty contests to choose his wife. >

#Rebbe sees in this behavior that #QueenEsther knew where things were really at. She recognized the practical need for the physical approach, but knew that the spiritual approach was at the heart of it and couldn't be sacrificed or ignored. She saw the inside of the #Purim story.

HAMANTASCH'S DEEPER FILLING

#hamantaschen may just be a #Purim cookie treat, but perhaps a #Hamantasch has more in it than just jelly filling, it may hold some clues to the meaning of #Purim and its lasting messages.

First of all, the #Purim story made #Haman "eat his hat" (which said to be 3-cornered like a Colonial hat) as he had the Jews cornered, the royal decree was sealed, it seemed like a done deal. But #Esther turned it all against him, and saved the Jews from genocide.

The #Megillah (Book of #Esther) reads like a novel of palace intrigue, its the only book in the Jewish Bible that doesn't mention G-d's name even once. But like a Hamantasch filling peeking through the dough opening, G-d is hidden & present, peeking out through the miracle.

Anyone who has baked a #Hamantasch knows that the triangular cookie starts off as a circle. Circle represents infinity, while triangle points in directions. Like the #Purim story, it may appear finite but the infinite is hidden within.

Pinching those #Hamantaschen corners is an important baking trick. No loose ends folks or you'll have the jelly all over. In the #Megillah everything comes together at the end, #Purim story has a lot of parts but a cohesive story.

BE THE FILLING! One year we had a "Be the Filling" #Hamantasch cutout at the #Purim Carnival. The dough is all the same, but we each add our own unique flavor. Invest of yourself! We each add to the #Mitzvah and holiday celebration...

THE MEGILLAH – STORY, CHARACTERS & KEY LINES

#Mitzvah to hear #Megillah 2x on #Purim, by night & by day. Perhaps its because the story has 2 sides: dark & light, both need to be heard.

The #trope #cantillation melody of #Purim #Megillah really captures the mood, message & inflection of the words. Love the sound of it!

#Purim's #Megillah tells us in great specific detail about King Achashvairosh's 180-day feast. Why is all that important to know, asks #Rebbe and learns life lesson how we ought to maximize our potential, fully utilize our resources to our utmost, never suffice with minimum.

#Mordechai wouldn't kneel nor bow to #Haman says the #Megillah. He stood strong & unwavering for his principles & values. This #Purim message speaks to us in every generation & locale of Jewish diaspora. Be proud of your heritage & identity, don't feel small or weak or pressured!

A key to the #Purim story is that #QueenEsther reported a discovered plot against the king in the name of #Mordechai. #Avot learns from this "quoting the source brings redemption". As college students, this is important to remember as it may redeem you from claims of plagiarism!

#Achashvairosh, King of the #Purim story: Was he clever or foolish, wicked or fickle, party animal or manipulator? or a combination thereof? The #Talmud charts his personality and character in different ways. We all know complicated people like that.

There's a line in #Purim #Megillah, #Mordechai tells #QueenEsther a motivating thought after her initial hesitation: "Perhaps for this you were chosen to be Queen". Such a line can be motivating to all of us in our wavering waffling reluctant moments "Perhaps it is for this!"

#Mordechai tells a reticent, initially reluctant #QueenEsther: "If you'll be silent at this crucial time, help will come from another source, but you will be lost to our people." It's a great mix of personal responsibility w/o self-importance, investment w/o ego. #Purim #Megillah

Besides for being a terribly evil man, #Haman of the #Purim story was a selfish narcissist. When the king asked him for ways to honor someone, he naturally thought it was about himself, never dreaming it would be to honor #Mordechai. His selfish thinking got him into a big mess.

There's so much psychology & human nature in the #Purim #Megillah and its commentaries. For example, the various reasons why #QueenEsther insisted on inviting #Haman to her private dinners with the king:

(1) #QueenEsther wanted #Haman to feel off-guard (2) She wanted to play on her husband the king's suspicious jealousies (3) She didn't want Jews in the know to feel smug in having a sister in the palace (4) She wanted to lay a trap for Haman (which she did). #Purim #Megillah

#QueenEsther was the only Jew not saved in the #Purim story. Her sacrifice enabled all other Jews to live. She remained married to a man she never wanted to marry whom she couldn't leave. Not all who live in a palace are happy. She was a trapped queen, a hidden loneliness within.

-- an important #Megillah point not to be overlooked. The heroine of #Purim, for whom the scroll is named, didn't have the same happy ending for herself, and in many ways suffered with this alone, in silence, in hiding.

#Purim's #Megillah climaxes in Chapter 7 but goes on for another 3 chapters. What does it teach us about finishing things up?

#Megillah's supporting actors: Charvona, Zeresh, Bigsan & Seresh etc, not as famous as Haman or Esther but #Purim wouldn't be same w/o them.

about #Charvona: he may or may not have been with #Haman at first, but he plays a crucial role exactly at the right time, his minor role clinches #QueenEsther's plan without which it may not have ended the same. Strike while iron is hot! And never underestimate people...

and an interesting #Megillah switch of wording when it mentions Zeresh, #Haman's wife. When Haman was at the zenith of his powers, it reads: Zeresh and all his friends, but when they smell his downfall, it becomes Zeresh and his wise men - they are friends no more.

#Purim has a subtle message about popularity. At the start of the story King Achashvairosh wanted his party to fulfill "everyone's wants/needs" but at the end of the #Megillah it tells us that #Mordechai was liked by MOST of his brethren. You can't make everyone happy!

HOW NOT TO TREAT YOUR SPOUSE

Sometimes the lesson to be learned is what NOT to do. In this vein, King #Achashvairosh in #Purim's #Megillah story teaches us important lessons on how we should not treat our wives.

let's start with Vashti: Don't make unreasonable demands of your wife. And that which is intimate between you don't make a public affair. Remember, it's not all about you, whether you are king or pauper. There's another person in this equation.

Then his absurd decree that all women respect their husbands. You can't demand respect, you have to earn it. Besides it's a sad sorry state of affairs when a husband/father rules his own home. It's a family not a business. Even business is better off not being top-down like that.

Now, it worked out well for us in the #Purim story when he ran a beauty contest to find a new wife. But that's very unhealthy in marriages. Comparing/contrasting with others is a terrible poison in relationships. And duh, there's more to women than complexion or body shape!

Now after all the king's effort to find a new queen in that beauty contest, #QueenEsther tells Mordechai of her reluctance to go see the king about #Haman's threat against the Jews because "the king hasn't asked to see me in 30 days!" What!?

One of the most important thing spouses can do for each other is to be present and available for one another. Be attentive, be aware of the other's needs, answer on the first call. A much shorter absence or lack of interest is already a huge problem - 30 days!?

OK, I get it that kings & queens had complicated relationships back then, but fast forward to our time: no spouse should feel that they are at the whim, beck & call of the other, have to ask permission to do anything (aside for respectful mutual consensus), or afraid to speak up.

#QueenEsther mustered up the courage, and we're all thankful for how that ended up but it's obvious that the king (her own husband!) fostered an unhealthy negative culture of fear, intimidation and distrust in his own home and inside his own closest relationships.

Now, it's easy to look back at this with 21st century lenses & dismiss these behaviors as primitive & backward. But all of these (in one form or another) do exist in families & relationships down to our day. We'd do well to heed #Megillah's lesson not to treat spouses like this!

it's actually quite remarkable (in this case, sad) how persistent & familiar human nature can be, despite all the progress & change over the many centuries. Yes, the context & format changes, but some of these character traits & flaws remain quite persistent albeit in new forms.

of course, of course, it goes without saying that this is not everyone! But all of us, no matter our personal character or type of relationship, will do well to review, rethink, and reflect on these matters which can be true in all forms & levels, even in the subtlest ways.