

Purim 2023 . . . relevant to today! by Rabbi Gary Atkins

Written after reading a recent AIPAC update on the serious dangers to Israel (and us) that a weak Iran nuclear agreement with the United States presents....

Purim, that most joyous holiday, also has its serious side. That has to be said. Yes, Purim is one of the happiest days in the Jewish calendar. Yes, it's the day on which we eat and drink and celebrate the story of Queen Esther – the hidden Jew who, under the guidance of Mordechai, turns the tables on Haman, who seeks to destroy the Jewish people. While the story took place in Persia in the 5th century BCE, it is one that has resonated and been celebrated through the ages, with Haman, a descendant of Amalek, representing all those over the centuries who sought to destroy the Jews. Esther and Mordechai were the heroes of the Jewish people then – and have been ever since.

But today Purim has become a problem for some Jews who are trying to rewrite or reinterpret the story. Esther has become a problem for some feminists who see her as simply going along with what Mordechai told her ... the typical subservient woman.

But this is not the only part of the Purim story that is being challenged, nor is it the most dangerous attack. Much more dangerous is the attack by both Jews and non-Jews who have a problem with the Purim story. The problem for them is that "we" won! Haman sought to destroy us, and instead we destroyed him! One of these critics wrote, *"We cannot ignore the fact that it is Esther who asked the king for the additional day on which the Jews can kill their enemies. We must challenge ourselves to find a way to celebrate Esther's power without necessarily endorsing the violence she authorizes."*

Esther and the Purim story will survive this contemporary assault. I am more concerned about the world's survival. You see, this attack on the violence of the Purim story is symptomatic of a mind-set that has taken hold in many corners of the civilized world. Many of the people and leaders of Western European countries have turned into "pacifists" – seeing all fighting as being wrong and believing that all differences are simply a matter of negotiation and compromise.

We all know the daily challenges Israel faces from terrorism. Despite the war with ISIS, here in America, we are no longer supposed to call it a "war" on terrorism. That is the thinking of many who claim that America is foolish to challenge Iran over its nuclear ambitions ... And that those who say that America must, if all else fails, attack Iran are simply "warmongers."

So, Haman, in the Purim story, finds himself in a situation where the tables have been turned on him. He has to adorn Mordechai in royal robes and put him on a horse and lead him through town. Let me share another story from the Talmud: When Haman bent over for Mordechai to climb on top of him

to get on the horse, Mordechai gave him a swift kick ... and you can guess where! And Haman turned to Mordechai and asked the question: "Just how far do you Jews have to go when you got your enemy on the run? Here I had sought to destroy you and I end up having to dress you and bow down to you. Isn't that enough? Is it not your Bible which teaches, "Rejoice not when your enemy falls?"

OK, we shouldn't rejoice at the downfall of a wicked person. We should be satisfied when their wickedness has ceased. But when you're dealing with a person like Haman whom the Bible tells us, "desired to kill and destroy every single Jewish person – young and old, little children and women." When you're dealing with a person of such enormous evil, with such a person, stopping their evil is not enough; you've got to stop them totally once and for all, or else they may rear their ugly heads once again.

The threat that Israel faces today from Hamas and even more Iran is nothing new; it goes all the way back to Purim. Iran's leaders are Haman reincarnated.

Robert Wistrich, the noted historian, writes in his book, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism From Antiquity to the Global Jihad*: *"For all the Iranian ruling echelon, eradicating Israel has become a declared foreign policy aim and acquiring nuclear weapons is central to its implementation ... The Shia Martyrdom Syndrome differentiates the Iranian nuclear weapons program from that of all other countries and makes it uniquely threatening."*

I for one, as do many in Israel, sense what the leaders of Iran want to do, The Megillah says it: "The archetypal Haman seeks to **"destroy and eradicate all of the Jews, young and old, women and children alike."** One should not hesitate to call for their being stopped. Let us hope that relentless pressure will dissuade Iran from continuing on their dangerous course!

are no people who hunger for peace as much as the Jewish people do. "Shalom" – peace – is the word on our lips throughout our prayers. *"Lu yihee – let it be" ... but until it is, let us be strong in overcoming those who seek to destroy us.* And as we do, it will be said of us what was eventually said of the Jews in the Purim Megillah: *"La-Yehuda hayata orah v'simcha* – for the Jews there was light and rejoicing." Amen.



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- Ruth Chevion for her wonderful stories about her family's escape from the Holocaust to America
- Temple Israel Book Club Leaders - Ken Cohn, Aida Koocher and Benay Birch
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Long-time member Hilda Landsman, currently in full-time care, was thrilled to receive Mishloach Manot to share with her daughter, Jeanette Chasin. If you would like to visit Hilda, please contact Christine in the office at 603.622.6171 or office@templeisraelmht.org for information. I know Hilda would be happy to see you!

Passover is coming!

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My Mother Prayed to the Virgin Mary and her Prayer was Heard by Ruth Chevion



My mother's maiden name was Herta Hausknecht. But in 1942, upon her escape from the Lvov ghetto she became Marta Zawatska (za-VAT-ska).

She studied hard. She was told to memorize her name so deeply, along with the details of where she was supposedly from, and all the

other details of her identity as printed in her false ID, that she would recite them correctly if awakened from deep sleep. Marta Zawatska. Marta Zawatska. Marta. Marta. Marta.

Before I tell you the story of what happened to Marta Zawatska, dear reader, I would like to take the liberty of fast forwarding to New York City in about 1980. My mother was already old, and I was sitting with her in the doctor's office. When the nurse came out to fetch her, the nurse called out "Marta" instead of "Herta." My mother fell instantly into what was for me a shocking incident of what can only be PTSD. She turned stiff and very red and started to breathe hard and look around with wild eyes. "Why did she call me that?" she asked several times, looking at me, looking around at the other people. "Why did she call me by that name?"

It took a while for her to melt and return to the present. What an extreme way to react to being called by her holocaust name. She might have said something like, "that is not my correct name." On the contrary, she seemed to acknowledge on some level that Marta Zawatska was her real name. Maybe someone reading this can explain it to me.

But it was with the name Marta Zawatska that my mother came closest to the flame. It was with that name that she was called to the Gestapo, and that she came out unscathed by praying to the Virgin Mary. This is the story:

Marta Zawatska landed initially in the town of Zakopane where a job had been arranged for her by her Aunt Fela as a nanny for two German children in the household of a German army officer. While it might have been considered dangerous for a Jew to work in the very maw of the beast, she did not have many choices. Marta Zawatska was 18 years old and had no marketable skills besides her fluent German. She had grown up in Vienna Austria and moved to Poland at age eleven. Her Polish and German speaking skills were equally fluent.

The nanny job went well for a while, so well in fact, that when the German man-of-the-house was called back to Berlin, the family wanted to take their nanny Marta with them. But they said, she would of course have to seek permission from the Gestapo to leave Poland. They had already arranged an appointment for her the next morning.

The first thing my mother did when she heard this, was to get a message to her Aunt Fela - the same aunt who had got her out of the Lvov ghetto, the same aunt who had vouched for her to get her the nanny job. Obviously if my mother was

found out to be Jewish, the thread would lead back to Fela, and Fela would be suspected also. She was living in the same town. In addition to herself, Fela had two children to protect. So the fact that my mother was called to the Gestapo was very dangerous indeed. My mother knew that she had to get instructions from Aunt Fela as to what to do. Should she run?

But Fela decreed that my mother was to report to the Gestapo as instructed. My mother had no place to hide if she ran and would surely be apprehended in no time. If she suddenly went absent from her job, Fela reasoned, Fela herself would be accused of harboring a Jew, and her children would be taken also. Without doubt, my mother would have to present herself to the Gestapo as Marta Zawatska, keep calm and do her best.

The interrogation was intense and long. Three Gestapo officers sat behind a desk, pointing a harsh light in her eyes, asking questions in quick succession. It lasted almost three hours. They asked about her childhood, the name of the school she went to, the names of her teachers, the name of the street she lived on, the house number, where her mother bought groceries, the name of the butcher, etc. With her lively imagination she answered all the questions, but the questions came back: what was the name of the school, and what street was it on, and what was the teacher's name, and who was the butcher, again and again.

My mother was blessed with an excellent memory. She passed. She was able to remember all the fabricated information she had given. They said she could go.

As she rose and turned to leave, one of the examining officers said, "Just a minute...before you go we want to hear you pray."

My mother knelt, crossed herself, and recited the Hail Mary in perfect Polish. After that they released her. But, again before she left, one of the examiners said they would in any event keep her ID papers for further research.

She left there knowing that if they researched her ID, she would be found out as having fabricated all these stories. The street name was wrong, the school, the teachers, the butcher, all of it was wrong. My mother had never even been to the town she was purporting to be from. But Fela had already foreseen all this and had arranged for her escape. That night, my mother jumped out of a second-floor window, into a waiting carriage driven by one Witold Moskalski. (Witold was the brother of Alicia Moskalska of the "Thelma and Louise" story from last month.)

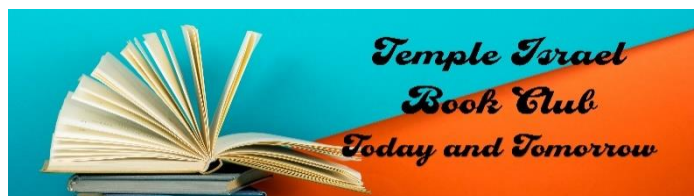
How come my mother could pray to the Virgin Mary? Her mother Susha had sent her daughter to secular Polish school. This was not an easy thing in Poland. School was not free. There was a lot of anti-Jewish discrimination for my mother to endure in school. But she liked the school anyway. She didn't even mind that every school day in Poland started with recitation of Hail Mary.

Funded in part by a grant from:



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Submitted by Ken Cohn
on behalf of my two fellow Book-a-teers,
Aida Koocher and Benay Birch

Welcome Temple Israel Readers:

On Wednesday March 15th we changed our zoom meeting time to 7:30pm in the hope we'd

attract more readers to the provocative titled book, "People Love Dead Jews" by Dara Horn.

Well, we had standing room only on our zoom screens. Fourteen devoted BOOK-A-TEERS came to the discussion with many distinct and thoughtful opinions. Some really LOVED the book, some DID NOT like the book. Most verbalized their reasons for Dara Horn writing this book.

Well, I can say, I'm glad I read it. (Actually, I read it and, also, listened to the audio version on HooplaDigital.com). At times, I got tired of Horn's sarcastic tone, but all and all, the audio version was very nice, and I enjoyed it.

ISRAEL'S 75th BIRTHDAY!! By Rabbi Gary Atkins

Some reminiscences as we look forward to a great celebration on Yom HaAtzmaut, 5 Iyar, April 26th!

My first visit to Israel did not take place until 1981, seven years after graduating from Seminary. Usually, students studied there for a year, but for various reasons I didn't.

Experiencing the "Holy Land" was a wonderful, life-changing experience. While walking around Jerusalem, I was approached (as were most tourists) by individuals offering to sell, for a few dollars, old coins from centuries past. I'm sure they had researched them to make sure they were either both common and/or in poor condition. But to me they still represented biblical history from thousands of years ago. Was this prutah (penny) handled by a famous Jewish teacher; was this "widows' mite" possibly handled by one of the first Christians?

Later on, I was given some potsherds from an archeological dig. When I retired from my congregation, my colleagues in Hartford gave me a goodbye gift of a real ancient Roman vial..... oh, what experiences these items had lived through!

A common take away opinion was that Horn achieved, what we surmised, was her goal of creating different thoughts, reflections, opinions, and increased knowledge of current and historical Jewish events. We would recommend this book, and don't be turned off by its title.

Next and tomorrow (in June 2023) we are tentatively looking at reading one of Harold Kushner's books. If this comes to pass, Rabbi Gary has graciously volunteered to add his knowledge and insights on one of Kushner's books.

Until then, keep reading and send me any suggestions of which Kushner book to discuss. Stay safe and may you enjoy as much peace in your lives as possible, SHALOM!

In the early 1980's I became acquainted with the Biblical Archaeology Review (or BAR). a quarterly journal popularizing the archaeological discoveries and research done in Israel or the area shedding light on the events of 2000-3000+ years ago. I have been a faithful subscriber.

Why do I share all this? Because the latest issue talks about the renewal of numerous opportunities to participate in various archaeological "digs," in Israel and countries beyond... in relation to seeking volunteers, the strictures of COVID have ended. This is something I often thought about doing but never managed to do. Might this be something you'd like to do for a few weeks or months?

You can go online and see both issues of the magazine (www.biblicalarcheology.com) and the article describing the opportunities available. And if you end up deciding to go on a "dig," be sure to let me know as well!

YOM HULEDET SAMEACH TO MEDINAT ISRAEL!



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April - Nisan 10 to Iyar 9, 5783

Happy Birthday!

Apr 1 - Neil Guttman

Apr 1 - Mirabel Welch

Apr 2 - Jeremy Geller

Apr 5 - Roberta Silberberg

Apr 8 - John Weber

Apr 9 - Sherri Keizman

Apr 10 - Niza Preis

Apr 13 - Lea Themea

Apr 14 - Lindsay Kilechovsky

Apr 16 - Carol Pressman

Apr 19 - Shayden Oberlander

Apr 23 - Nancy Steinbock

Happy Anniversary!

Debbie & Peter Manning
April 12 - 37 years

Sedra Michaelson & Ron Deeter
April 27 - 37 years

Upcoming Services & Events

Mar 29	7:00am	Morning Minyan. Contact JLKlein@comcast.net
April 1	10:00am	Shabbat Service
April 2	9:30am	Sunday Funday. Contact familyeducator@aol.com
April 5	7:00am	Morning Minyan 7:00am. JLKlein@comcast.net
April 6	10:00am	Passover Morning Service
April 6	6:00pm	Passover Seder, rsup required
April 12	7:00am	Passover morning service with Yizkor
April 16	10:00am	Schvitz Squad. Contact Norri333@aol.com
April 16	4:30pm	י"ח יום ח'שואה. Contact shaliach@jewishnh.org
April 19	7:00am	Morning Minyan. Contact JLKlein@comcast.net
April 21	6:00pm	Family Shabbat and dinner
April 26	7:00am	Morning Minyan. Contact JLKlein@comcast.net
April 29	10:00am	Shabbat Service

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