

Purim in Massachusetts 3/6/2025

By Jim Leffert

Original Music by David Rosenthal

SCENE 1: BEDROOM, Yankel and Naamah

(Yankel and his wife, Na'amah are sitting at home in bed.)

Yankel: I'm afraid it's going to be another sleepless night! It's been like this for weeks now—How can I get it to stop?
I'm so preoccupied! Can I list it for you?

How about, everything going on in the Middle East, and everything going on here in the United States...especially since October 7th. Is that enough? I'm overwhelmed! I hardly know what to think! I'm so conflicted! And look! Extremists on all sides are having a huge influence on these events and public opinion...I'm a wreck!

Na'amah: Oh, it's really hard. I'm so sorry! Now I know why our ancestors looked forward to getting drunk on Purim! But speaking of Purim, being awake at night may have been helpful for King Ahashveros, but it's not going to do you any good--or make the world any better.

Yankel: That's for sure! Getting drunk won't help me! My lack of sleep has really humiliated me. Would you believe my job is in jeopardy now? Today, my boss called me in for a chat. He told me he's concerned because my productivity has declined lately, along with my libido.

Naamah: Your libido? How does your boss know about that?

Yankel: He doesn't, but apparently, someone misunderstood something I wrote on Slack and started a rumor. My co-worker asked about an application that I was supposed to install online, and I wrote him back, "I've tried several times, but I can't get it up." Maybe that was the wrong choice of words...

So, I'm at risk of losing my job and my anxiety is going through the roof. I desperately need a good night's sleep, but I can't get one.

Naamah: Try one of these melatonin pills—they help me sleep better.

Yankel takes one of the pills, lies down under the blankets, and nods off to sleep. Some noise is heard, gradually increasing in volume as the scene switches to a radio studio.

Announcer: (volume gradually increases): Next up, the Sunday Schmooze on WBMA FM 89.3 and streaming worldwide.

SCENE 2: RADIO BROADCAST STUDIO – Rosie/Sammy

(Rosie and Sammy sit at a desk with MICROPHONES in front of them. There is a “WBMA FM 89.3” SIGN on the desk. There is also a PHONE.)

Rosie: Welcome to the Sunday Schmooze, your source for news and entertainment for the Jewish Community--in Eastern Massachusetts and worldwide. I’m Rosie Rosegarten and as always, I’m here with my good friend, the Sultan of Schmooze, Sammy Sternweiss. Sammy, what’s on tap for today?

Sammy:

We have some special features to celebrate Purim, which starts this Thursday evening. First, to get us in the mood, let’s hear a Purim Song—“Blot Him Out” by The Graggers.

(Song)

*We were listening to the words of the Megillah
How the King got mad and forced the Queen to flee
And how Esther ended up as her successor
So far, the tale’s unfolding peacefully*

*But I feel a growing sense of expectation
As the story arrives at Chapter 3.
‘Cause there’s coming on the scene
An official cruel and mean
He’ll get the king to sign his foul decree!*

Chorus

*So blot him out, blot him out, blot him out!
Make sure that Haman’s name is barely heard
Blot him out, blot him out, blot him out!*

Make this villain's name a silent word!

*Some people shake their graggers so they're clacking
Other graggers make a click crack noise, of course
People stamp their feet
And the racket's not complete
Until we hiss and boo until we're hoarse!*

Chorus

*Blot him out, blot him out, blot him out!
Make sure that Haman's name is barely heard
Blot him out, blot him out, blot him out!
Make this villain's name a silent word!*

*Our tradition tells us we should love our neighbor
And in every person try to see some worth
But this can be tough work
If your neighbor is a jerk
Who is driving you berserk
With some quirk that's bound to irk!*

*So give thanks that once a year
When this character appears
We don't have to be so kind
Or work hard some good to find
Cause he's rotten to the core
He's our enemy, what's more,
He represents all evil here on Earth!*

Chorus

*So blot him out, blot him out, blot him out!
He's got menace oozing out from every pore
Blot him out, blot him out, blot him out!
'Cause he's a villain we despise
We'll make his evil neutralize
We'll blot this vile loutout forevermore!*

SCENE 3: RADIO BROADCAST STUDIO – Suki & Simon

(Now, Suki sits at another broadcast table near Rosie and Sammy. Simon sits next to her.)

Rosie: I hope you enjoyed that song. Next, we have a report from our roving reporter, Suki Shpilkes. Suki?

Suki: The past year-and-a-half has been a stressful time for American Jews, with events in and around Israel and reverberations here at home. During the past 17 months, not surprisingly, American Jews have experienced, on average, an 8.5% increase in hypertension, gained 4.75 pounds, and had a 21% decrease in hours of sleep. This is according to a recent report by the Jewish Gesundheit Foundation,

Sammy: Wow, those numbers are nothing to sneeze at!

Suki: The health impacts are even greater for people living on--or close to--a college campus.

Here, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, one Jewish man has come up with a novel strategy to cope with the stress. *(Turns to Simon)* Simon, tell us about the recent difficulty that you've experienced and what you've done about it.

Simon: My difficulty??? Oy! Do I worry!
About Israel, surrounded by hostile nations,
about hostages left in Gaza,
about all the dead in Gaza and all the bombed ruins,
about Netanyahu's goal of "total victory" without a "day-after" plan
about my wish for a strong Israel, not a pariah state

about the loss of the ability to maintain civil free speech on college campuses,
and, about the verbal and physical assaults on Jews and on Zionism.

On one hand, I want Jews to be able to speak out forcefully with criticisms of Israel,
but on the other, I'm pained by the loss of respect, hatred and rejection of Israel and Zionism.

Everything is so unstable: Democrats are called anti-Israel; Republicans are pro-Israel.

Trump gets credit for the cease fire and hostage release deal, but he is a scary fascist!

He's even dropped U.S. sanctions against the Jewish thugs, the ones who keep attacking Palestinian villages and never get punished.

Suki: Wow, that's a lot that's troubling you. How has it been affecting you?

Simon: It's made me a nervous wreck and totally confused by my conflicting opinions and feelings. For a while, I was barely able to function.

Suki: But I hear that you've found a coping strategy.

Simon: Yes--actually, my therapist suggested it. She suggested that I defend Israel and push for universities to crack down on anti-Israel campus activism on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and criticize Israel and advocate for free speech, within limits, on campuses, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Saturdays, I take a rest.

Suki: And has this helped?

Simon: Except this week, I ran into such a problem! Our City Council will soon debate a resolution that condemns Israel and supports Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions against Israel. I want to speak out strongly against it.

Suki: So, what's the problem!

Simon: The hearing is scheduled for Monday! I wrote them to explain my situation. And I asked them to postpone the hearing until Tuesday.

Suki: I hope it works out ok for you. Still, all things being equal, here's one American Jew who has found a way to cope with emotionally stressful circumstances.

SCENE 4: RADIO BROADCAST STUDIO / Rabbi Starr SERMONIZING / Activists take over

Rosie: Thank you, Suki, for that report.

Sammy: In just a few days, we'll be hearing the Book of Esther, the Megillah, chanted aloud. Today, we have a special guest, Rabbi Malcolm Starr from Kehillat HaMishuchrarrim in Freetown, Massachusetts, who is going to share thoughts about the meaning of the Purim story. Here's Rabbi Starr...

(Rabbi Starr stands next to the broadcast table. Rosie and Sammy watch him and listen.)

Rabbi Starr: The Megillah has a message that's so important--that we have to stand together and identify as Jews. The heroine went by a Persian name, Esther, instead of her Hebrew birth name, Hadassah. She was trying to hide her identity and assimilate into Persian society—and she was so successful, that no one in the palace could even tell she was Jewish! And then, when Mordecai needed Esther to save the Jewish people, she didn't want to get involved. She didn't even know the Jews were in danger! Only when Esther came out, and presented herself as a Jew, was she able to triumph and save her people. So, the story of Purim teaches us: don't try to assimilate, be visible and stand up for our people!

(Rabbi Starr exits. Enter Two Progressive Diaspora Liberation Front activists. One is carrying a bundle that may be a bomb.)

Activist #1: Stop! Stop this blathering! I'm carrying a bomb. Do what we say or I'll blow up the studio and everyone in it!

Activist #2 : We're from the Progressive Diaspora Liberation Front and we are taking over this studio and program. The State of Israel is rotten to the core, it's killing too many innocent people. It's a blot on our people's good name. Yet week after week, you promote a pro-Israel agenda, you play Israeli songs, you express support for Israel. Today, we're putting an end to it!

Activist #1: The Book of Esther demonstrates that Jews in the Diaspora don't need a sovereign nation or army to protect them. Just like Mordecai

and Esther, we can use our wits and our skills *here* to overcome whatever problems arise. Also, here, not in Israel, we can live side by side and make common cause with other marginalized groups--and maintain our rich, spiritually satisfying religious culture!

Activist #2: We have four non-negotiable demands:

- 1) Stop using the Sephardic Hebrew pronunciation that the Zionists foisted on us. From now on, it's Ashkenazish all the time, plus a little Yiddish. It means Shabbos instead of Shabbat and if you're called up to the Torah, it means saying nahsan lanu toras emes instead of natan lanu torat emet, and nosain haTorah instead of notain haTorah. Agreed?

Rosie (voice quavering): Sure, anything you say!

Activist #1:

- 2) No more Israeli songs—just Hassidic, neo-Hassidic, and neo-neo-Hassidic nigunim, with some Debbie Friedman, Benny Friedman, and Nefesh Mountain thrown in. Agreed?

Sammy: Yes! B'lee Nedder (*fingers crossed visible to audience*).

Activist #1: Billy Nedder? Sure, you can play him as long as he's not an Israeli!

(*continues*):

- 3) Focus your commentaries and interviews on the crimes of the Israeli regime, and on our activism. For example, our nationwide boycott of falafel, hummus, and shwarma.

Rosie: That's going too far! Do you expect our people to live on kasha varnishkas and blintzes?

Activist #2: Watch it, lady—don't be a kvetcher, or soon you'll be gehen tief in drerd! (*points to the ground*) —and your family—you rmishpucha— will need a shovel to visit you!

- 4) Finally, hamentashen must be sold with a warning label that says "baked in memory of Persians slaughtered by revenge-seeking Jews".

Sammy: Oy, you've got to be kidding! How long is this torture going to go on?

(All of a sudden, two members of the North American Hilltop Youth rush in with guns:):

Hilltop #1: Ok, hands in the air, everybody. (All comply except Activist #1. *To activist #1:*) Hey you, put down that bomb! You are such wimps, that's probably just a rutabaga with a dishrag covering it. (*Activist #1 lowers it to the ground, unhappily. Hilltop #1 continues:*) We're the Hilltop Youth, North American affiliate, and we had the same idea these people had, to take over the radio studio, but we brought *real* weapons!

Hilltop #2: We're tired of American Jews with their so-called progressive views and their namby-pamby opinions or downright hostility toward Israel. From now on, spread the message that the Israel is our God-given land. And-- by reclaiming the entire Land of Israel-- we are fulfilling God's plan for the beginning of the Messianic Age!

Activist #2: You people are power-mad fascists. You have to be stopped!

Hilltop #1: Shut your mouth, or I'm going to shoot it full of holes!

(Phone rings.)

Rosie: We have a caller. (*Picks up phone and says:*) Hello and welcome to Sunday Schmooze. (*She then adds in a stage whisper:*) Please call the police. We've been taken hostage here!

Caller (Split Screen): Here I've been stuck on hold for 15 minutes, and I finally get a chance to talk, and now you want me to hang up and call somebody? No way! That Rabbi who was on before who said that the Purim Story was about assimilation—he's a schmendrik and a tam--a simpleton! Send him back to the Seminary for remedial instruction!

Rosie (stage whisper): Please—call the police!

Caller: Stop interrupting--Let me finish! (*Continues:*) I'll tell you what the Book of Esther is about! It's taking a mirror to our cracked-up planet and

showing how messed up it is. The King, who's supposed to be in charge, is a complete idiot! One minute he tells Haman to kill the Jews and the next minute, he has Haman honor Mordecai by parading him through the streets. One minute he's given the Persians permission to kill the Jews, the next minute, he's allowing the Jews to slaughter the Persians! And events in the story happen at random, with no rhyme or reason!

Hilltop #1 (Interrupts): Cut this dodo off! (*Rosie complise, caller is gone, and Hilltop #1 continues:*) How can anybody be this stupid? God is pulling the strings, and the Megillah is all about the fulfillment of God's plan for the Jewish people.

Hilltop #2: Just like what we're doing in Israel today! And God is helping us - in ancient times, King Cyrus was carrying out God's plan by allowing the exiles to return to Jerusalem, and now God has inspired Donald Trump with his proposal to move the Gazans away from Gaza. Go ahead and play our anthem, "Shutafim Im Elokim, We're Partners with God".

Activist #1: Never mind that fancy propaganda ditty. I dare you to play "Golfing in Gaza"!

Hilltop #2: We're happy to play "Golfing in Gaza". It's one of our favorite songs. Play it, Sammy!

(Sammy punches in a few buttons and puts on song.)

Golfing in Gaza

For 20 years it's been Judenrein
Gaza, the promised land, that Sharon declined
Our homes and greenhouses sadly crushed to rubble
And since we left Gaza, there's been nothing but trouble

Now the locals fled, leaving barren ground
Since we destroyed their homes, shot at all who stayed around
The army thinks they did this to make Israel secure
But we know it's God's plan to get us in by the back door!

Fulfill our vow, Fulfill our vow, with God's help, the time is now

Then came Donald Trump, he spoke like a sage
 He said move the Gazans out, now it's time to turn the page
 We're ready to start building, complete with plans and crews
 A lovely, lavish private homeland for the Jews!

Building back our towns, nicer than before
 Beachfronts, tennis, amenities galore!
 A golf course drawing crowds by the score
 The heavenly sound of golfers yelling "Fore!"

(Brief musical Interlude)

We'll restore a jewel of God's promised land
 We'll have Arab caddies there to lend a hand
 We'll plant grass for the traps, 'cause the fairway's made of sand
 Folks will flock to play our course in holy Gaza land!

With 18 holes sanctioned by the PGA
 The land will grow holier every time we play
 Every stroke hastens the Messianic day
 When all Jews will go golfing in Gaza!

SCENE 5: RADIO BROADCAST STUDIO / ELIJAH ENTERS

Activist #1: This is truly obscene. *(To Rosie and Sammy:)* Are you going to let them use your show to spread this poison on the airwaves? You have a moral duty to lay down your lives rather than allow this!

Rosie: Maybe it is my moral duty, but the rabbis said that there are three sins that a Jew should choose to die for, by Kiddush Hashem, rather than commit. Is allowing propaganda that besmirches the reputation of the Jewish people one of them? No, it's not. Also--maybe it's good that our listeners hear firsthand what this group is planning.

Activist #2: I don't think so! So, if you don't stop them, then I will!

(The Hilltop Youth raise their guns and are about to shoot him when Elijah enters the scene.)

Elijah: Put those down!

(The Hilltop Youth involuntarily drop their guns).

Hilltop #2: Who are you, Benjamin Buttinsky?

Elijah: Eliyahu HaNavi, Elijah the Prophet. *(To hosts:)* One of your online listeners in Jerusalem wrote a plea for help on a slip of paper--a petek--and slipped it into a crack in the Kotel, the Western Wall. I came as soon as I saw it. *(To the Intruders:)* I appreciate your zealous spirit and determination. After all I was a lot like you in my day.

Activist #2: Since that's the case, isn't it hypocritical of you to come along and stifle our zealous campaign against oppression?

Elijah: It looks that way, but later on, I left zealousness behind and practiced *rachmonis*--compassion--after I heard a divine message from a Still Small Voice. You can check it out in First Kings, chapter 19. Here's what the message said:

(Song)

Life is complicated, reality's complex
Oversimplify, you just end up with dreck
You must strike a balance, figure out how to
Meet your clan's needs while respecting others' too!

Remember that all nations have one God as their source
That is what I learned when I heard the Still Small Voice!

Sometimes folks sound certain, full of rectitude
Just pull back the curtain -- you'll find their thought is crude
When your mind is storm-tossed, heaving to and fro--
That's actually a sign that reality is so!

So step down from your soap box, take a broader view
Cultivate *rachmonis* when folks are not like you
A firm decision's fine--as long as it's a thoughtful choice
That will show you've listened to the Still Small Voice,
Yes, that will show you've listened to the Still Small Voice!

SCENE 6: RADIO BROADCAST STUDIO / ELIJAH ENTERS

Elijah: Well, what do you think?

Hilltop #1: There's something in what you say, I'll have to think about it more.

Activist #1: I agree, maybe we've been too one-sided.

Activist #2: What do you mean? This is just a wishy-washy liberal siren song!

Hilltop #2: My thoughts exactly. We're going to liberate this radio show and no one's gonna stop us!

Activist #2: You may be a prophet, but this is a non-prophet station!

Elijah: Don't tempt me. I'm trying to end this peacefully, but if you don't leave, I'll have to give you the same treatment I gave the prophets of Baal!

Hilltop #2 and Activist #2 (together): I'm not afraid of you!

(Elijah lifts his arms...)

SCENE 7: BEDROOM, Yankel and Naamah

(...and Yankel, who has been lying in bed off to the side, screams—and wakes up.)

Naamah: (rushes in and says) What happened, are you alright?

Yankel: I just had the most frightening and amazing dream.
(Looks at clock) It's 7:45. I slept through the whole night!

Naamah: I didn't want to wake you.

Yankel: I've got to get to work, but that was the full night of sleep that I've been missing. Wow, I feel better, thanks to Elijah and the Still Small Voice!

SCENE 8: Whole Cast joins the singers who reprise:

(Song)

*So step down from your soap box, take a broader view
Cultivate rachmonis when folks are not like you
A firm decision's fine--as long as it's a thoughtful choice
That will show you've listened to the Still Small Voice,
Yes, that will show you've listened to the Still Small Voice!*

The End