

LBT's From Light to Liberation: Joy

Week of February 21, 2021 / 9 Adar 5781

Framing: There's an old joke that every Jewish holiday can be summed up with the words, "They tried to kill us, they didn't, let's eat!" We all know the feeling of experiencing terror or fright, then suddenly feeling safe and becoming unexpectedly and possibly even uncontrollably giddy. Of all of the holidays, Purim best represents this saying and the emotional swing from terror to pure joy. Set in ancient Persia and recounted in Megillat Esther (the Scroll of Esther), Purim commemorates the Jewish people being saved from the evil Persian official, Haman, who was planning to kill all the Jews. When the story begins, Haman "draws lots" -- called *Purim* in Persian -- and determines that on the 13th of Adar, people across the entire world shall rise up and kill the Jews living in their province. As the Jews faced this day of terror, the courageous Esther and her heroic uncle Mordechai saved the day, allowing the Jews to rise up and defend themselves against their enemies and Haman's minions. In stark contrast to the harrowing terror of the attempted extermination, the Megillah teaches us that we are supposed to honor this day with joy and celebration that the Jews surely felt on the other side. The feeling of joy can be one of spiritual cleansing and liberation, an exhilarating release.

אסתר ט:כ"ב-כ"ג

כ) ויכתב מרדכי את הדברים האלה וישלח ספרים אל כל יהודי ים אשר בכל מדינות המלך אחשוורוש הקרובים והרחוקים: (כא) לקיים עליהם להיות עשירים את יום ארבעה עשר לחודש אדר ואת יום חמשה עשר בו בכל שנה ושנה: (כב) כימים אשר נחוו בהם היהודים מאויביהם והח' דש אשר נהפך להם מגיון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב לעשות אותם ימי משתה ושמחה ומשלוח מנות איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים:

Esther 9:20-22

(20) Mordecai recorded these events. And he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, near and far, (21) charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year— (22) the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.

Questions for Reflection:

1. The text presents the four *mitzvot* of Purim: to read the Megillah, to present gifts to each other and the poor, and to eat a festive meal together. Why do you think they added in a commandment of giving to the poor as part of the holiday? What role does joy play in your generosity when giving tzedakah to the poor or gifts to beloveds?
2. Think of a time you laughed uncontrollably? What environment, mindset or people do you need around you to allow this type of laughter? How does your meditation practice invite you to cultivate joy?
3. One of the beautiful parts of this text is the transformation from a horribly negative situation to fabulously positive one. As part of your mindfulness practice this week, take something that has been bothering you and try to consider ways in which this "negative" event, attitude, person or problem can be seen with fresh eyes, to be inverted, to create some distance from you and the "negative"-ness of the thing in order to explore the possibility of how it may have a positive influence on you.