

Tani Talks Life (TTL), Brought to you by The Tani Talks Podcasts-This is the Shiur Where We Talk A Topic Per Session With Some Practical Lessons

Tonight's Topic: "Removing our masks and unleashing our true selves"

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The shiur should also be for the refuah and yeshuah of anyone who wants or needs

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Growing up, a lot of us don't reveal to the world our hidden internal selves. We don't share our struggles, our fights, our battles, our wars with the world. Most people don't know what we are going through on a daily basis. Most people don't know what goes on behind closed doors of a home or closed doors within a person and their soul.

We need to change that. It is important to share your struggles with another, whether a spouse or family member or trusted mentor or therapist, as the saying goes and I am majorly chopping it and paraphrasing, when you share your struggle you unleash your burden and it is easier to carry.

People say in the non jewish word that purim is the jewish halloween Lhavdil and Chas vshalom. But nothing could be future from the truth. Yes on both days people might wear costumes and dress up but the similarities end there. Whereas in October its about trick or treat, basically collecting as much candy as possible, on purim lhavdil its about giving, giving to friends, giving to the poor, giving of our joy and ourselves to others.

Remember the mask and the costume is only as a hint to what Hashem did in the purim story, saving the jews in a mask behind the scenes, but really the holiday is much more than just wearing a costume and a mask.

Purim gives us the time to take off our masks and reveal our true selves. The geamra, the Talmud says,

[Sanhedrin 38a:2-3](#)

Having mentioned the sons of Rabbi Hiyya, the Gemara relates: **Yehuda and Hizkiyya, sons of Rabbi Hiyya, were sitting at a meal before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, and they were not saying anything.** Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to his servants: **Add more wine for the young men, so that they will say something. Once they were inebriated, they loosened their tongues and said: The son of David, i.e., the Messiah, will not come until two fathers' houses are destroyed from Israel,** as those two families are preventing the redemption. **And they are the head of the exile who is in Babylonia, i.e., the family of the Exilarch, and the Nasi who is in Eretz Yisrael, i.e., the family of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (see 5a), as it is stated in reference to the Messiah: "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel"** (Isaiah 8:14). Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to them: **My children, do you throw thorns in my eyes?** How can you say this in the presence of the *Nasi* himself? **Rabbi Hiyya said to him: My teacher, do not view their behavior in a negative light. Wine [yayin] is given in letters of seventy, i.e., the numerical value of the letters in the word yayin is seventy, and secret [sod] is given in letters of seventy, i.e., the numerical value of the letters in the word sod is seventy. When wine enters, secrets emerge. Nichnas yayin, yatza sod.**

Eruvin 65b:1-2

This teaches that if wine flows in a person's house like water, there is a blessing, but if not, there is no blessing. Rabbi Elai said: In three matters a person's true character is ascertained; in his cup, i.e., his behavior when he drinks; in his pocket, i.e., his conduct in his financial dealings with other people; and in his anger. And some say: A person also reveals his real nature in his laughter.

I myself am not a drinker of alcohol, bli neder, not on purim, not on simchas torah, not on Shabbos or yom tov. I actually love sparkling grape juice. I do not like to see what happens in the negative when people consume alcohol on purim, not only the terrible behavior and chillul hashem in our towns and communities, not only the damage and destruction I have seen from drunk boys and girls and men and women, especially I saw in yeshiva days, but also what havoc people do to their own bodies.

Before you drink this purim, think to yourself, how much do you really need? When and why are you drinking? When is the mitzvah? In what context?

Rabbi Enkin point out on outorah.org

The Talmud in Megilla 7b teaches that one is required to get drunk on Purim until one cannot distinguish between "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai".^[1] The reason for this requirement is in order to recall the many miracles of the Purim story which actually occurred during the course of wine parties, such as Vashti's downfall, Esther's rise to royalty, and Haman's execution.^[2] How drunk is one supposed to get on Purim? The Talmud relates that Rabba and Rabbi Zeira once held their Purim seuda together. Rabba became so intoxicated at the meal that he got up and "slaughtered" Rabbi Zeira as a result of having become so drunk. Not to worry, though. The following day Rabba prayed for Divine mercy and had Rabbi Zeira resurrected.^[3] The following year, Rabba again invited Rabbi Zeira over for the Purim meal, but Rabbi Zeira declined the invite, explaining that one cannot always expect miracles to occur.

One who suspects that their drunkenness could lead to murder or other unacceptable conduct should not drink, though all others are indeed required to intoxicate themselves on Purim.^[4] According to many authorities, one is literally required to get drunk on Purim to the point that one cannot distinguish between "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai".^[5] This was in fact the practice of many great rabbis.^[6] Other authorities suggest that the point of intoxication one must reach is simply where one would be unable to recite the ancient liturgical poem of "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai".^[7] **Yet others suggest that one is merely required to drink "a little more than usual" on Purim which would bring on drowsiness and cause one to fall asleep.**^[8] One can certainly not tell the difference between "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai" while one is sleeping.^[9]

There exists a very different approach to the issue of drinking on Purim as well. According to some authorities one should, in fact, not drink on Purim at all. Indeed, it is suggested that the entire reason that the Talmud troubled itself to record the story of Rabba killing Rabbi Zeira was in order to show us precisely why we should *not* drink on Purim.^[13]

Contrary to popular misconception, the mitzva of drinking on Purim is intended to be performed exclusively with wine, to the exclusion of all other alcoholic beverages.^[14] It is also noted^[15] that drinking wine on Purim is meant to be reminiscent of the verse: "wine gladdens the heart of man".^[16] Some authorities suggest that because wine was a much stronger drink in Talmudic times than it is today, it is permissible to drink whiskey and other alcoholic beverages in fulfillment of this mitzva as well.^[17] So too, the drinking is meant

to take place specifically within the context of the Purim seuda, and it is not intended to serve as an excuse for a drinking spree throughout the day.^[18] The mitzva of drinking is in effect only on Purim day. There is no mitzva to drink on Purim night.^[19]

here also exists what seems to be somewhat of a compromise approach to the requirement of drinking on Purim. Some authorities suggest that drinking is merely recommended, but not truly required.^[20] Likewise, one who has a weak disposition or otherwise feels that drinking will harm him is exempt from the requirement to drink.^[21] One is also not permitted to drink excessively on Purim if one fears that it may lead to violating, or being unable to fulfill other important mitzvot such as reciting the birkat hamazon after one's Purim meal or davening ma'ariv the night following Purim. Indeed, in such situations, it is far better for one not to drink at all.^[22]

So I ask you, I implore you again, why do people drink on purim? What shitah are they relying on at night? During the day? Outside of the seudah. I myself do not drink, period. I see many authorities to rely upon for this. If you want your secrets to come out, talk to a mentor, talk to a therapist, talk to someone. Better yet, use the gemara about other aspects to show your true character—with your wallet or your laughter, not with anger or alcohol.

You want to be involved in real good mitzvos of Purim day? Get involved in the beauty of the day the joy of the day without need for drink—dress up, wear costumes, wear themes, do lots of shaloch manos and gifts for the poor, listen intently with your kids to megillah, have a beautiful feast. Show your true self without need for dangerous substances of alcohol in your body.

The Talmud also points out how careful to be with wine and alcohol to begin with:

Sanhedrin 70a

Rava raises a similar contradiction: It is written: “And wine that **gladdens** the heart of man” (Psalms 104:15). The word for gladdens could be read as *yeshamah*, meaning that wine makes one crazy, **but we read it as *yesamah*, gladdens the heart.** The matter can be explained as follows: If **one merits** and drinks a moderate amount the wine **gladdens him [*mesameho*]**, whereas if **he does not merit** and drinks excessively **it makes him crazy [*meshamemehu*]**. **And that is what Rava meant when he said: Wine and fragrant spices have made me wise;** that is to say, the controlled drinking of wine is beneficial to the drinker.

A visitor from the Galilee expounded: The conversive *vav* is stated thirteen times in the passage concerning wine, as it is stated: “**And Noah began [*vayyahel*] to be a farmer, and he planted [*vayyita*] a vineyard, and he drank [*vayyeshit*] of the wine, and was drunk [*vayyishkar*]; and he was uncovered [*vayyitgal*] within his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw [*vayyar*] the form of his father, and told [*vayyaged*] his two brothers outside. And Shem and Japheth took [*vayyikah*] the garment, and laid it [*vayyasimu*] upon both their shoulders, and went [*vayyelekh*] backward, and covered [*vaykhassu*] the form of their father; and their faces were backward, and they did not see their father's form. And Noah awoke [*vayyiketz*] from his wine, and knew [*vayyeda*] what his younger son had done to him” (Genesis 9:20–24). All thirteen instances of the conversive *vav* here are followed by the letter *yod*. Together they form the word *vay*, meaning woe, and allude to the suffering and misfortune caused by uncontrolled drinking.**

Don't get pulled into the wine or the alcohol. Be careful. Better yet, avoid it at all costs. There are so many other ways to be yotze that one small aspect of the real mitzvos of the day, which really are the megillah, the seuda, the shaloch manos and the gifts for the poor.

The gemara goes on to explain The verse states: “**And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard.**” In explanation of this matter, **Rav Hisda says that Rav Ukva says, and some say that Mar Ukva says that Rabbi Zakkai says: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Noah: Noah, shouldn't you have learned from Adam the first man, whose banishment from the Garden of Eden was caused only by wine?** The Gemara notes: This is **in accordance with the opinion of the one who says that the tree from which**

Adam the first man ate was a grapevine. As it is taught in a baraita: Rabbi Meir says: The tree from which Adam the first man ate was a grapevine...

[Sanhedrin 70b:1](#)

as, even today, nothing except wine brings wailing and trouble upon a person; most sins are caused by drunkenness.

[Berakhot 29b:16](#)

On the topic of prayers recited while traveling and in times of danger, the Gemara discusses the traveler's prayer. When he appeared to him, **Elijah the Prophet said to Rav Yehuda brother of Rav Sala Ḥasida: Do not get angry and you will not sin. Do not get drunk and you will not sin...**

On the other hand, **one who is intoxicated with wine must not pray, and if he prayed, his prayer is an abomination.**

What are the circumstances where a person is considered **one who has drunk** wine, **and what are the circumstances** where a person is considered **one who is intoxicated** with wine? **One who has drunk** wine refers to **anyone** who has drunk wine but whose mind remains clear enough **that he is able to talk in the presence of a king.** **One who is intoxicated** refers to **anyone** who is so disoriented by the wine he has drunk **that he is not able to talk in the presence of a king.**

Rabbi Abramowitz points out from Hashoneh Halachos 142:6

The Purim miracle was brought about through wine - Vashti was deposed during a banquet of wine, causing her to be replaced by Esther; Haman's downfall was likewise brought about through wine - therefore we are obligated to celebrate by drinking wine. The Talmud ([Megillah 7b](#)) says that a person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai." One should at least drink more than he usually does in commemoration of the Purim miracle, then fall asleep. While he is sleeping, he certainly won't know the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai." ([Mishnah Brurah 695:5](#) approves of this course of action.) One whose nature is weak, or who knows that if he overindulges he will likely come to treat some mitzvah, bracha or tefilla lightly, or one who knows he will behave inappropriately, should not drink so much. By not drinking, all of his actions will be considered for the sake of Heaven.

Wine causes more problems than it solves. Avoid it to avoid problems and maybe take a small nap instead or just take a sip if you're used to none at all.

The Shulchan Aruch, the code of Jewish law itself says explicitly:

Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 695

1. *RAMA: It is a mitzvah to many feasts during Purim (Tur), but one fulfills his obligation with only one feast (Mordechai) One who does the Purim meal at night does not fulfill his obligation. RAMA: Nevertheless, one should be happy and add more during his meal even at night (Teshuvat Mahariv).*
2. *2. One is obligated to be intoxicated on Purim to the point where he does not know [the difference] between "accursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai". RAMA: Some say it is not necessary to become drunk so much, but rather to drink more than he is used to (Kol Bo), and to fall asleep, and while he sleeps he does not know [the difference] between "accursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai" (Maharil). [There is no difference on Purim] between one who has more and one who has less, as long as his heart is directed to heaven. One is obligated to drink a little and be a little happy on two days, the 14th and the 15th (Minhagim), and so is the custom.*

The Gemara says in Megilla 7b

You have fulfilled two mitzvot through us, our teacher: The mitzva of: **“And sending portions one to another,”** and the mitzva of: **“And gifts to the poor,”** as [Rabbi Oshaya](#) was poor and this was a substantial gift.

The gemara goes on to show tht shaloch manos, if too hard for you to be lavish, go simple, as the story explains:

In describing that same incident, **Abaye said: When I left the house of the master, Rabba, to go to Marei bar Mar, I was already satiated.** However, **when I arrived there** at Marei bar Mar's house, **they served me sixty plates of sixty kinds of cooked dishes, and I ate sixty portions from each of them. The last dish was called pot roast, and I was still so hungry that I wanted to chew the plate afterward.**

And in continuation **Abaye said: This** explains the folk saying **that people say: The poor man is hungry and does not know it**, as Abaye was unaware how hungry he had been in his master's house. **Alternatively**, there is another appropriate, popular expression: **Room** in the stomach **for sweets** can always be **found**.

Aish.com by Kalman Packouz

During the day only of Purim, besides for reading the megillah and the usual mitvot of davening, tzitzis and the like, we fulfill three mitzvot:

1. **Matanot L'evyonim** -- giving gifts or money to at least two poor people.
2. Giving at least two ready-to-eat foods to a minimum of one person (called **Mishloach Manot**, the "sending of portions" which is best fulfilled via a messenger (you can order Kosher Purim baskets from: White's Candies Tel. (305) 865-0433 or <http://www.ftd.com/surf> or from The Kosher Connection, 800-950-7227).
3. Having a **Seudah**, a festive meal, where we are commanded to drink wine until we don't know the difference between "Blessed is Mordechai" and "Cursed is Haman." (It can also be fulfilled by drinking a little and taking a nap -- one doesn't know the difference between them while sleeping...) Why are we instructed to drink this amount?

Aish.com by Yisroel Juskowitz

On Purim we dress up with masks and costumes. This seemingly superficial custom is laden with deeper meaning. On Purim we remember that in the world, nothing is as it seems. The real world lies beneath all the superficiality. In fact, the words Megillat Esther, the Scroll of Esther, also means to reveal (megaleh in Hebrew) the hidden (haster). The Purim story peels back the mask and reveals that which is hidden.

Many of the main characters in the Esther story wear masks, not identifying who they really are or what their true motives are. Haman pretends to have the only the king's best interests in mind when he advises the king to annihilate the Jewish People, pretending that the Jews are a threat to his kingdom since they follow their own laws and customs, and not those of the rest of Persia. In reality, he sought to destroy the Jews for his own evil genocidal wishes, as he was the descendant of Amalek, the ancient biblical tribe that was best on the destruction of the Jewish People.

Mordechai never reveals that he is a relative and friend of Esther's; he pretends to be a simple person who happened to save the King's life. It is Esther who reveals it to the king at the end that Mordechai is her dear relative.

And of course, Esther herself wears a mask; she pretends to be a gentile queen, never revealing her Jewish identity, until the very end of the Purim story.

And the Master of the Universe Himself wears a mask throughout the story. God's name is never mentioned in the Megillah. In fact, the entire Purim story seems to come about completely through natural occurrences; there are no open miracles in the story.

The Talmud alludes to this idea as well. The Talmud asks "Where do we find a hint to Esther from the Torah? From the verse "Anochi Aster, haster mipani" which means "Behold I will hide My Face from you." The name Esther comes from the Hebrew Aster, hidden. Indeed, God is hidden throughout the story and it is up to us to see His Hand.

This is the beautiful irony: Haman is trying to deny the Hand of God in everything, and right in this same story, God is showing that He in fact is orchestrating the whole story! When we read Megillat Esther, we are "revealing that which is hidden", revealing God's guiding hand even in natural occurrences.

Purim shows us that the entire world is a mask. The real world remains underneath the surface. In life so often we wear masks, afraid to show our true spiritual selves. So on Purim we purposely wear the mask to expose it for what it truly is – nothing more than a façade. And we drink to the point of openly showing our inner spiritual joy. We read the Megillah story and see the secret Hidden Hand of God revealed once and for all.

The Talmud compares our exile to "night" and the Purim story to "dawn." For when dawn comes, all is revealed, and what once appeared to be dark is now bathed in shimmering sunlight. Let us all remember this beautiful message of Purim, and indeed reveal the inner beauty within, and appreciate God's Hand in all that we see and do.

Aish.com by Rabbi Kahn

Have you ever been in a situation in which you were afraid to reveal who you really are? Have you ever felt as if you were wearing a mask and dressed up like someone else? This can happen to individuals, but it can also happen to a nation.

One of the results of living in a new place is acculturation. Even when this process is not taken to the extreme level of assimilation, there is still a heavy price to be paid. Even mild acculturation can set off an existential crisis. This is precisely what happened to a large segment of the Jewish people some 2500 years ago. As strangers in a strange land, they did what they felt they had to do to "fit in." And yet, the forces of socialization and acculturation have posed a threat to Jewish identity in so many places throughout history that the story recounted in the Book of Esther transcends the particulars of that very specific time and place.

Part of the Party

The Book of Esther is set in what are best described as "interesting times." A new dictator had come to power in Shushan as the result of a bloody coup. King Ahashveroush was celebrating his many conquests, and the acculturated Jews of Shushan found themselves at the epicenter of a celebration of epic proportions. Participation in the revelry was not optional; those who abstained would be accused of sedition.

Imagine, then, the discomfort of the Jews at the celebration of Ahashverosh's conquest and subjugation of Jerusalem. When Ahashverosh appeared before his subjects, rowdy and drunk, dressed in the garments of the High Priest of the Jews taken when the Holy Temple was destroyed, the Jews must certainly have felt awkward, at the very least. Ahashverosh had shed his "normal" costume – the royal garments he had usurped from his predecessor – in favor of a new costume, in order to underscore his success while at the same time extinguishing the hope for repatriation that many Jews must have harbored.

The Jews of Shushan were also in costume.

And yet, their discomfort notwithstanding, the Jews of Shushan were not as different from Ahashverosh as we would like to believe; they, too, were in costume. They were dressed like all the other citizens of Shushan, with smiles on their faces and drinks in hand. They, too, toasted the king.

How widespread was the acculturation process and how deep had it penetrated? As for Ahashverosh, neither of his costumes fit him well; not only was he far from being the High Priest, he was not really regal in any way. His royal clothes did not fit him particularly well, because they had been tailored to the dimensions of the king whom he had deposed.

The King's Queen

Queen Vashti had her own take on the costume ball. She was one of Ahashverosh's most important conquests, for it was her royal blood that gave him legitimacy. When he demanded that she appear before the assembled guests without her royal garb, he intended to strip her of the power and nobility that these garments symbolized. He fully intended to humiliate her and remind her that he was now king. She refused to come in costume – for a queen stripped of her clothes would surely be a costume of another sort. She was hastily rendered obsolete.

The king now found himself alone and in desperate need of a new queen. His advisors came up with a wonderful plan: they would have a beauty contest of sorts. Each night a different girl would dress up as queen-for-the-night; in the morning she would be sent away. The "winner" would receive the crown, and be allowed to dress up as the queen on a permanent basis - or at least until the king's next outburst of drunken rage, which was certainly an occupational hazard for women in this line of work.

Esther was also in costume, forced to participate in this "contest."

There was a nice Jewish girl who lived in Shushan whom everyone knew as Esther, but her real name was Hadassah. She, too, was in costume. Esther was forced to participate in this "contest." She alone did not ask for props, special oils or perfumes. Unlike all the other contestants, she had no desire to be the queen for this king.

But something interesting happened; of all the women, the one that the king wanted was Esther. Men often want what they cannot have, and the regal Esther, aloof and ambivalent, was strikingly different from all the others (who were probably wearing a bit too much perfume and makeup) who so desperately wished to be

chosen that they were trying a bit too hard to catch the king's eye. Esther was regal. She reminded Ahashverosh of his former queen, and she was chosen. In fact, what Ahashverosh saw was no costume; in Esther, who appeared before him as she was, the royalty of Jewish women shone through.

The Megalomaniac

Haman, a cunning, ruthless and manipulative advisor to the king, was a sycophant who used his intelligence to catapult himself above all the other advisors. Haman was a megalomaniac, who decreed that all the king's subjects were to bow before him. Everyone in the kingdom complied, fearing for their lives. Only one man, Mordechai, refused to bow down; as a Jew, Mordechai refused to bow before any man.

Just to make things a little more interesting, this same Mordechai had once alerted the king about an assassination plot, and had earned the king's trust. To further complicate matters, Mordechai also happened to be Esther's cousin and most trusted advisor.

Haman would have his revenge. Not only would he kill Mordechai, he would annihilate all the Jews.

Haman could not bear the affront to his pride; he would have his revenge. Not only would he kill Mordechai, he would annihilate all the Jews. The king, who had every good reason to be paranoid, would be easy to convince. Haman need only suggest to the king the dangers posed by this fifth column, this dangerous, subversive group living throughout the kingdom. After making a large donation to the king's coffers, Haman received the king's seal of approval, and the fate of all the Jews in the kingdom was sealed.

Mordechai and Esther Change Clothing

When Mordechai heard of the decree, he, too, "dressed up"; he put on sackcloth, clothes of mourning. Esther was appalled; one simply could not sit in the capital wearing clothes of mourning. The king was happy, the people were celebrating; such dress could be interpreted as a symbol of rebellion. She pleaded with Mordechai to be reasonable, but he was adamant, going so far as to suggest that her destiny had now become apparent. She had ascended the throne for the sole purpose of acting on behalf of the Jewish People.

Esther knew what she must do. She must don the clothing of the queen, assume the persona that would gain her entrée into the inner sanctum. The risk was enormous; the king was completely given over to his paranoia. The price he paid for taking the kingdom by force was the torment of seeing conspiracy around every corner. He was so convinced that there were untold others plotting to do precisely what he had done, that he instituted rules for self-preservation: Uninvited guests could be put to death – including the queen.

Esther puts on her royal garb and goes to see the king. She looks stunning. The king is enthralled. Esther, it seems, has finally warmed up to him, and he is willing to fulfill all and any of her wishes. She invites him to join her that night in a special party. And then, almost as an afterthought, she adds: "... and bring Haman along."

Esther's plan was exquisitely simple: she pitted Ahashverosh's paranoia against Haman's megalomania.

Esther's plan was exquisitely simple: she pitted Ahashverosh's paranoia against Haman's megalomania. At this point the king's mind is reeling. On the one hand, Esther wants to see him – which, to his mind, is quite understandable, he being the man that he is - but why is Haman invited? His mind races as he prepares for the party. Haman, on the other hand, seems oblivious; he was only too happy to be on the "A list," invited to the most exclusive events.

To increase the pressure, she invites both men to join her again the following evening. Haman is high as a kite, even manic. At last his greatness is recognized, confirmed for all to see. As he leaves the palace, everyone who sees him bows down, with the exception of one man - Mordechai.

This is enough to set Haman off; he comes home seething. His wonderful day has been ruined by this thorn in his side, Mordechai the Jew. He is advised to hang Mordechai and be done with the court Jew. Haman's depression is replaced by a burst of manic energy. He rushes out to prepare the gallows, and then, at around midnight, comes to see the king – surely not the wisest way to approach a paranoid monarch. Haman has become careless, and he fails to read the fear on Ahashverosh's face, the fear born of paranoia and set in motion by the queen's invitation.

Ahashverosh has spent the evening barely afloat in a sea of doubt and dread. He is certain there is a plot afoot. Are his queen and advisor in cahoots? He cannot sleep; he reviews the royal diary for clues, and is reminded that a man named Mordechai had alerted him to a plot to assassinate him. He studies the plot, perhaps looking for parallels to his current situation, but at the same time he notices that Mordechai was never properly rewarded.

The Turnabout

At this point, Haman enters, and Ahashverosh asks him, "What should be the proper reward for someone whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman, so caught up in his own narcissism, is convinced that he is the object of the king's favor. He lets down his guard and reveals his true aspirations: "Dress him in the king's clothes and crown, and parade him through the capitol on the king's horse." It is hard to imagine a worse suggestion for this king at this time.

When the king commands Haman, the notorious anti-Semite, to do all these things for Mordechai the Jew, and to personally lead the horse through the streets, Haman is devastated. He will not wear the king's clothes, and he will appear to all who see him as nothing more than the stable hand, the position held by Ahashverosh before he staged his coup. All at once, Haman is cut down to size; in truth, he has only been dressing up as advisor to the king. His true status is far more lowly.

In a sense, the rest of the plot is details: Haman finds his way to the very gallows he made for Mordechai, and the threat against the Jews is averted. The story ends as Esther and Mordechai are dressed in royal clothing.

Every year on Purim, the holiday created to celebrate the Jews' salvation, we read the story, make parties, drink wine. But there is one more custom that is an integral part of the Purim experience: people dress up. Purim is a reminder that we spend so much of our lives dressing up and leading lives that are in dissonance with our souls. We allow our disguises to lull us into a false sense of identity, placing our faith in the masks we wear rather than in the natural beauty of Jewish destiny.

Our goal as Jews is to find our true clothing and our true selves, both as individuals and as a nation. This is the clothing of royalty that we hope to reclaim, speedily and in our time.

Rabbi Blech from aish.com

Although Purim masks and protective facemasks are different, there may be a profound connection. To grasp its deeper meaning, let's reflect on the reason masks made their way into celebrating Purim in the first place.

Masks hide what's behind them. And that's why masks became identified with the story of Purim. The Scroll of Esther has a unique characteristic. It tells us all about Esther and Mordecai, yet it omits the name of God. God is hidden in a book commemorating a miracle for which He is clearly to be credited. How strange!

Stranger still is the name of the person who is accorded the honor of the book's title. It is known to this day as Megillat Esther. The Talmud asks a peculiar question: where is Esther to be found in the Five Books of Moses? The query makes no sense. The Torah predates Esther by many many centuries. There is no way Esther could possibly be found in the Torah. Yet the Talmud answers that there is a biblical verse which alludes to her – and to her significant role as savior of the Jewish people from the genocidal plans of Haman in later day Persia. In Deuteronomy 32:20 God prophetically tells the Jewish people there will come a time when “I will hide my face from them.” In Hebrew the phrase for hiding is haster aster – the very root letters of the name Esther. That was the genius of the Talmudic rabbis. They recognized Esther as a “hidden” way of identifying God's presence.

In the Megillah, ostensibly the story of a miracle performed by God, His name is absent, hidden by the countless “coincidences” that are really the results of concealed divine intervention. The very word “Megillah” means not only scroll but also “to reveal.” The mitzvah of reading Megillat Esther is in a more profound sense mean to inspire us to uncover God when he chooses to test us by remaining hidden.

When God wears a mask, our task is to acknowledge His guiding presence even when we can't clearly make out His face.

There are times when God wears a mask, and our task is to acknowledge His guiding presence even when we can't clearly make out His face.

Purim is not like Passover. The Passover miracles were clear and indisputable. Purim requires a greater level of wisdom and understanding. All other holidays, says the Talmud, will eventually be eliminated – except for Purim. Purim is the paradigm of our challenge to maintain our faith even when His face is hidden behind a mask of seeming indifference to our plight.

We need to remember that the Jews of the Purim story spent agonizing years as spectators to frightening events. The party in Shushan recorded at the beginning of the Megillah was held by the king to celebrate his conquest of the holy items of the temple. The rise of Haman and his genocidal plot against the Jewish people played out over a lengthy period of time which surely tested faith in God and his continued presence.

We've spent a year in distress, incomprehension and agony. Some of our greatest spiritual giants were taken from us in this year of horror. Families witnessed the untimely – and sometimes exceedingly painful – death of loved ones. The world has changed in so many ways that we can hardly begin to count them or even to be fully aware of their extent and future influence.

On this first anniversary that coincides with Purim, let's reaffirm that although we do not understand, we continue to have faith. Like Purim, at times God puts on a mask and conceals His presence and His purpose. But as Purim also teaches us, miracles of salvation are part of the story as well, and we have every certainty that the day will come when masks will no longer conceal the Almighty's presence – nor be required by a soon-to-be conquered pandemic.

Debbie Gutfreund explains on aish.com

Here are four masks we wear and how to take them off on Purim:

1. Mask of Self-Containment. We don't want to be needy. We don't want to be dependent. And sometimes we don't even want to connect with others because we are afraid of being hurt. So we wear masks of self-containment; we tell ourselves that we are fine on our own.

But God created us with a deep, spiritual yearning to connect to each other. We do need each other, and none of us can live happily and successfully without our families, our friends and our communities.

So send mishloach manot, packages that show that you care. Send them to people that you haven't yet connected to or even to people that have hurt you in the past. Let's take off our defensive masks and try putting on faces that are unafraid of connection and vulnerability.

2. Mask of Busyness. Every day we are busy – work, carpool, errands, email, phones constantly beeping, the clock ticking. We are distracted by the mask of our busyness because life is hectic and it's hard to focus.

On Purim let's put away our phones and schedule the errands for another day. Focus on being. On transcending the limits of our ordinary days. On getting past the mundane distractions by sitting down to a festive Purim meal with family and friends. Eat delicious food. Have deep conversations. Try on open, focused faces that can see the blessings and the beauty of the people and the abundance surrounding us.

3. Mask of Materialism. Sometimes we get mired down in the materialism of our lives. We wear masks of identifying with just our bodies, just the surfaces, just the objects in our lives. And this narrows our vision and blocks our path. We don't need to deny ourselves the physical pleasures of this world. On Purim use every single one to get beyond the surface.

Eat chocolate, drink wine, wear a funny costume and take off the mask of materialism by recognizing that God gives us each of these pleasures to connect to Him, and to create kindness and gratitude in our lives. Recognize that we have a channel to uplift our souls by making blessings on the food we eat. Try on faces glowing with the joy of living with our souls.

4. Mask of Doubt. Sometimes life is full of so much uncertainty and so many challenges. So many parts of our lives don't seem to make any sense. We walk around wearing masks of doubt. We say we believe in God, but we walk around seeing randomness and disconnection in our lives.

On Purim, listen to the Book of Esther. Learn it and see the depth and see how God planned every single, tiny detail. How He placed each person in the exact place in the exact time that he needed to be there. How He set up our salvation before our downfall. How He hid beneath the story line but revealed His kindness and love for us in the end. Let's take off our masks of doubt and try on faces alive with faith and belief in the exquisite interconnectedness between every person and event in our lives.

For one day, let's work on seeing how everything that seemed random was in fact carefully chosen for us. How something that seemed so painful at one time brought us to a place we never could have reached without it. Let's pretend for one day that we are reading the stories of our lives out loud, and that we are not ashamed to face ourselves, to hear our secrets, to take off the masks that block us from everything that is real.

From aish.com

It's easy to be intimidated by mean people. See through their mask. Underneath is an insecure and unhappy person. They are alienated from others because they are alienated from themselves.

Have compassion for them. Not pity, not condemning, not fear, but compassion. Feel for their suffering. Identify with their core humanity. You might be able to influence them for the good. You might not. Either way your compassion frees you from their destructiveness. And if you would like to help them change, compassion gives you a chance to succeed.

Aish.com from Emunah Braverman

Who doesn't like to dress up on Purim? (Well, some of my kids actually, and they get really embarrassed when we do!). There are many explanations for why we wear costumes on Purim, and one struck me as particularly relevant this year.

Costumes lead to unity, to a sense of togetherness. Disguises mask the differences that block us, that get in our way, that lead to disagreements, pain and alienation. They allow us to focus on how we are more similar than not.

The Jewish people uniting was a crucial ingredient in the saving of the nation in the Purim story. Just as parents look more favorably upon their children when they are together in harmony, God also desires unity and looks more favorably upon His children when we express love and caring towards each other. When wearing a costume, we stop noticing who is taller or shorter or with better clothing or not. It's not apparent who is wealthier or more accomplished or whose children got into a better college. Our differences are smoothed over and we can focus better on what we share. We are united in our celebration of the gift of the holiday and the recognition of the salvation brought about by our Father in Heaven.

The costume doesn't have to be fancy to achieve this goal; it just has to be. our masks take us out of ourselves, out of our petty concerns and foolish resentments, out of our limited perspective on our lives and our people.

We can't live a life behind a mask but we can take the insight with us long after Purim recedes. In recent times, we have all been so focused on the areas where we disagree, on the issues that divide, on philosophies that drive us apart.

Let's take advantage of the opportunity of the holiday of Purim and the costume-wearing which is definitely not just for children to come together, to remember who we are and what we share, and most of all to remind ourselves that we are all children of the same Creator and that His greatest desire is for us to take pleasure in each other.

Just like we want to give our biological parents nachas, so too do we want to give nachas to our Heavenly Father. If it takes a costume to accomplish this, then count us in.

Aish.com from Rabbi Moskowitz

One of my favorite books is "Wonder," in which R. J. Palacio tells the (fictional) story of Auggie Pullman, a ten-year-old boy just like anyone you know. He eats ice cream, rides his bike, plays ball, and has a great sense

of humor. But the moment older people look at him they avert their eyes, and little kids get scared and start screaming or saying something nasty and hurtful. Auggie was born with numerous genetic abnormalities, and even after 27 surgeries, Auggie bears facial disfigurements so pronounced that people who see him for the first time quickly look away as they try to manage their shock and horror. When describing his face, he writes, “Whatever you’re thinking, it’s probably worse.”

Auggie begins his tale by introducing himself:

I know I’m not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things... and I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don’t make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don’t get stared at wherever they go. If I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish, I would wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all. I would wish that I could walk down the street without people seeing me and then doing that look away thing. Here’s what I think: the only reason I’m not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way.

Then he describes the one day a year that he gets to wear a mask. “For me, Halloween is the best holiday in the world... I get to dress up in a costume. I get to wear a mask. I get to go around like every other kid with a mask and nobody thinks I look weird. Nobody takes a second look. Nobody notices me. Nobody knows me. I wish every day could be [just like it]. We could all wear masks all the time. Then we could walk around and get to know each other before we got to see what we looked like under the masks.”

Despite the obvious challenges that come with wearing a mask, perhaps Auggie’s right; maybe there is an enormous upside to it (besides the health benefits). When we wear masks, when we disguise and minimize what we look like on the outside, only then can we really get to know the real person. We can see people for their substance, who they truly are, and not focus on trivial externalities. We can all focus on what’s inside a person, beneath the surface, and on what truly matters.

Our Sages tell us “Don’t look at the jug but rather look at what’s inside” (ibid 4:20). If only we could look into the contents of the jar instead of making assumptions based on looks and appearances, how much better and more civilized would our society be?

Too often, we focus and judge people on their externalities. We make snap decisions about whether or not we like a person or trust a person based solely on how the person looks and with complete disregard for who that person truly is.

Perhaps wearing masks can help shift our focus away from those externalities and instead towards an emphasis on more meaningful interactions.

The next time you pick up your mask to go to the supermarket or outdoor minyan, instead of lamenting this uncomfortable task, ask yourself the following questions: Wouldn’t it be great if we looked past the externalities by which we so regularly judge each other? Wouldn’t it be great if we heeded Auggie Pullman’s advice and “get to know each other before we got to see what we looked like under the masks?” How much more inclusive, warm and welcoming would our communities look like then.

Aish.com from Eve Levy

A few years ago God sent the author a test.

One chilly February night her husband, Gadi, and her were joyously dancing at the wedding of close friends. They came home tired but happy. Her husband had been complaining of an earache that day and even asked a doctor at the wedding to take a look in his ear. There wasn't much they could do for his discomfort and he eventually he fell asleep.

She woke up the next morning and started getting the kids ready for school, preparing lunches and doing the usual busy morning activities. She noticed her husband was still in bed. This was unusual; he usually wakes up early to go to shul. She gently tried to wake him and then went back to helping the kids get ready for school.

"I can't close my eye. I can't move my face... I can't smile."

That's when she heard him call her. "something strange is happening to me... I can't close my eye. I can't move my face... I can't smile."

Sure enough, there was her husband sitting up in bed, trying to wiggle his face, but only half his face had any movement. After a quick Google search, they self-diagnosed his situation as Bell's Palsy, a form of facial paralysis that causes an inability to control facial muscles on the affected side. Often the eye cannot close. They read that 10 percent of people with Bell's Palsy do not fully recover.

Gadi's eyes were red and tearing from the dryness. His face looked scary. He tried to smile, to show it was going to be okay, and she burst out crying. She was in a state of shock. She was waiting for him to just snap out of this. But he didn't. He couldn't. I begged him to get back into bed and rest.

At the time, he was under a lot of stress and they read that Bell's Palsy is often stress-induced. She told him to get back into bed and rest. She would make an appointment with his doctor. He remained in bed and she left to take the kids to school and carry on with my day. A few hours later he walked into the office at the JCC to prepare for his class. When she saw him, she jumped out of my seat.

He looked awful! She was horrified for people to see him looking like that, horrified for him and for herself. She wanted him to hide until everything went back to normal. "Maybe you should put a big brown paper bag over your head!" She said half-jokingly. But Gadi wasn't embarrassed. He just wanted to carry on with life as usual.

The next day Gadi was planning to give the class to her Thursday ladies' "lunch and learn". She felt so uncomfortable. He taped a black pirate's patch over his eye and it kept falling off. She told him that he could take a rain check. He insisted on teaching as if nothing was wrong. He had to hold up half of his face in order not to slur his words. She sat there in her friend's living room, holding back her tears. The women in the class were throwing pitying glances. But Gadi forged on, giving the entire class.

She sat there feeling so miserable about her husband's appearance. Yet, she also felt such pride in his refusal to give into that ailment and not to let it get him down. Her emotions were on a roller coaster; she was both saddened and impressed.

This continued for six long weeks. The doctors, and they saw quite a few, said it was impossible to know how long the symptoms would last. They were hopeful that he would recover but it was going to take time. He was very weak and needed to rest a lot. He was taking heavy steroid medications and undergoing acupuncture. As challenging as it was on him, she was the one who was taking it terribly hard! She cried so much during those weeks. She was a complete wreck!

Even though her husband looked "ugly" on the outside, he was still wonderful, kind and gentle on the inside.

But the kids barely noticed it. They loved their father just the same. They weren't frightened or repulsed by his look. They snuggled close to him and wanted to be around him, just as always. Even though her husband looked “ugly” on the outside, he was still nice, kind and gentle on the inside.

Purim was approaching and She tried to throw herself into the preparations. They joked about dressing up as pirates and wearing black patches, just like the one that Daddy wore over his eye. As a family they decided to dress up as ugly ogres. Their home was filled with laughter which helped considerably to relieve her stress and tension.

Things started feeling a bit better. She felt it was going to be okay. Under that “mask” was her wonderful husband, Gadi. She started to ignore the stares they got in the street. She didn't mind being out with him in public. Let the world see a great person, not from his external appearance, but from within. And slowly but surely, Gadi's face started to improve.

She knows that God put her through this test in order to grow. Seeing her husband's “mask” enabled her to more deeply appreciate his internal beauty, his true essence. And there she was hiding behind so many masks. She had to emerge. Her main one was the perfectionist mask. And boy, is that a heavy mask to uphold. But there are many masks worn over time...the overachiever, the good one, the people pleaser, the cool kid, the victim, the jokester, the savior, the martyr...there is a whole box of masks.

Masks are used as a coping mechanism to shield ourselves from the world. It is not always a bad thing to wear a mask. Sometimes it is necessary as a protective measure in a world that can be very harsh and has unrealistic expectations of us. But how often am I in a mask? How does it serve me? When do we feel the need to put on a mask? By and large young children don't wear masks. They're happy just being their authentic selves. It's only when the world around them criticizes them and cuts them down do they start adding layers to fit in, to protect themselves from harm.

We know when we are being our true authentic self or not.

On Purim, we dress up in costume. Why do we have this silly custom on such a holy day?

The Hebrew word for clothing is beged. It is the same root as the Hebrew word bo'ged, which means “traitor.” Our clothes often betray who we really are. The way we dress can easily misrepresent the person. By dressing in costumes, we are making a declaration, as if to say that our clothing is just a misrepresentation of our true self. God is much more interested in our true inner essence. It's who we really are inside that counts.

So this Purim will you let your masks down and show up as the real you? We know firsthand how difficult this is. We know all too well the feelings of being judged and the fear that come along with putting it down. But you can have also experienced the sweetness of giving the world and your loved ones the real you. The world needs you. This Purim God needs you.

Shimon Apisdorf from aish.com

a costume can be liberating. All you need is a mask and some old clothing and no one will ever know who you are. Suddenly you are free to be yourself. You can go around telling corny jokes and making people laugh (if bringing smiles to people's faces is what you would really like to do). Or you can spend time visiting a nursing home (if warming lonely hearts is what you are really all about). Or you can be a king and treat your wife like a queen. Or be a horse and give all the neighborhood kids a ride. Or anything else you really want to be – but aren't – because of what other people will think.

And if you do it right on Purim, you just might find that you no longer care as much about what other people think.

Costumes and Laughter

We all have an alter ego, a part of us that would like to be something we are not. This alter ego is an inner adversary that can foil our best attempt to achieve what we want to achieve. At times it seems that we are forever locked in a struggle: us against ourselves.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg of Jerusalem, says that on Purim you should dress up as your alter ego – and laugh.

Do you want to devote your weekends to bettering your community, but you feel like going fishing? Then dress up like a fisherman, and laugh at yourself.

Do you want to be there when your kids need you, but you feel like watching a good movie on television? So dress up like a couch potato, and laugh.

More than Bart Simpson or Louis CK, there is a deeper side to laughter. It cuts things down to size. Like when we get too serious about things or overly absorbed in our work, or ourselves. At these times, laughter is therapeutic. It cuts things down to size and helps us gain some much-needed perspective.

Haman built a gallows upon which to hang Mordechai, and suddenly Haman himself is hanged on those very gallows. The 13th day of Adar had been decreed as a day of destruction for the Jewish people; and in a flash it became a moment of salvation. Laughter comes when a predictable sequence of events suddenly produces the unexpected.

Purim is a time for tapping into the power of laughter. We realize that no matter how bleak things seem, we must never give up hope. And when we dress like our alter ego, like a couch potato, a beauty queen, or president of the United States – we laugh. And cut our nemesis down to size.

Aish.com from Rabbi Blech

George Eliot is credited with saying, “History repeats itself.” Mark Twain sharply improved on it with his observation that “history doesn’t repeat itself – but it does rhyme.” No matter how much things may change, one constant always remains: the Hamans of the world, the Jew haters who seek “to destroy, to murder and to bring to an end all Jews, from young to old”, are somehow forever with us.

It was foretold in the Torah. In the first battle against Amalek, prototype of the anti-Semite throughout the ages, we are informed that although the Jews won the fight, Joshua only “weakened” our enemy. Amalek survived. He continues to plague us in many disguises – masks which have become part of Purim ritual to remind us that people often conceal their true intentions under the guise of noble goals even as they plot the genocide of our people.

What happened in Shushan is the story of our people throughout the ages. It isn’t just ancient Persia, the persecutions and the pogroms of the Middle Ages or even the Holocaust of the 20th century. Tragically it is the story once again of our own times. Not only Persia/Iran but sophisticated France, cultured England, educated Europe and the rest of the “civilized world” are again proving the truth of Elie Wiesel’s insight that “the only thing we have learned from history is that we do not learn anything from history.”

As we recall the Purim story once again, its warning of enemies who seek our destruction assumes such powerful relevance even here in the United States today.

Let me remind you a little bit about the Jews in Persia of old. When King Achashverosh celebrated his ascent to the throne he threw a huge party to which all were invited. Jews were welcome guests. The drinking was in accord with people’s different faiths. In retrospect, a bill decrying hatred against any and all minority groups would almost certainly have passed in the Persian Congress. Yet it only took a short while for Haman to turn his strategy of genocide into national policy.

What was the key to Haman’s success? His speech is recorded in the Megillah:

And Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and separate among the peoples throughout all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws differ from [those of] every people, and they do not keep the king's laws; it is [therefore] of no use for the king to let them be (Book of Esther 3:8).

The Jews have dual loyalty!

That is their crime. It's always been Amalek's secret weapon. Hitler knew it. Stalin knew it. Read the Torah on the way in which Pharaoh was able to turn the Egyptians against the Hebrews – the same Egyptians who had been saved by the wisdom of Joseph – and you will find the similar strategy:

“ He said to his people, ‘Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we are. Get ready, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they increase, and a war befall us, and they join our enemies and wage war against us and depart from the land’” (Exodus 2:9 – 10).

Winston Churchill famously said, “A lie gets halfway around the world before truth puts on its boots.” The lie of Jewish dual loyalty is perpetuated by the Hamans of history even as Jews wherever they reside prove the truth of the promise given by God to Abraham that “I will bless those who bless you.”

Purim, happily, is not merely the story of anti-Semitism; it is the biblical record of a major victory over a nefarious anti-Semite. And perhaps the most ironic part of the story is a truth made famous these past few weeks by a contemporary Jew hater.

For the Book of Esther, “the Benjamin” was revealing to us at the outset that Mordechai was “Ish Yemini”, from the tribe of Benjamin. And why was that so significant? The rabbis explain that was the reason Mordechai was able to counter Haman's libel and to demonstrate to us throughout the ages how best to overcome our enemies.

While others bowed down to Haman, Mordechai refused. It was a trait he inherited genetically. The rabbis tell us that when Jacob met with his brother Esau he bowed down to him. According to some commentaries, it was a sin for which he would be held accountable. And 11 of Jacob's sons bowed down as well. Only Benjamin, who was not yet born, did not bow. And so Mordechai, a direct descendent of Benjamin, maintained the tradition of his ancestor.

Aware of the threat to their survival, Jews need to put aside their differences and unite in the face of a common enemy.

The man who would not bow down to an enemy in humble submission is the one who encouraged Esther to similarly stand proudly and firmly, without embarrassment or fear, and speak up on behalf of our people. “Who knows,” he told her, “if not for a time such as this have you been placed in this position of rulership.”

Mordechai and Esther are the heroes of the Purim story because they refused to cower before those who sought to destroy our people. They spoke out against their Haman with all of their strength. It's all about the Benjamins and those who refuse to remain silent when enemies again plot “the final solution” for Israel and for our people. History records not only the recurring story of anti-Semites and anti-Semitism. It also confirms the Divine intervention that has invariably assured our survival.

Kalman Packouz points out on aish.com

Why do we masquerade with costumes and masks on Purim? Nowhere in the Megilat Esther is God's name mentioned. If one so desires, he can see the whole Purim story as a chain of coincidences totally devoid of Divine Providence. Just as we hide behind masks, but our essence is still there, so too God has "hidden His face" behind the forces of history, but is still there guiding history.

From Nesanel Safran on aish.com

It was the first sunny day in a long time. Michael Jacobs was sitting in his garage with a bicycle pump in his hand. He was just about to inflate his basketball which had gone flat over the winter, when he heard his mom call out in her sing-song voice, "Mich-ael, where are you?"

Michael put down the pump and made his way around the back of the house. Dodging a clothesline, he put his chin up onto the kitchen windowsill where he saw his mother rushing around tidying up. "Yeah Mom?" he said.

Mrs. Jacobs jumped back slightly. "Oh Michael, don't you ever use a door?"

Michael chuckled.

"Well anyway," his Mom went on. "I just got off the phone with Aunt Esther. She and your cousin Ralph are in town for the afternoon, and they're coming over for a visit. So please straighten up your room and change into some clean clothes before they come."

Michael groaned. "Oh Mom, of all days for cousin Ralph to come visit!"

Mrs. Jacobs looked confused. "What's wrong?" she said. "I thought you'd be happy he was coming."

Michael blushed. "I am, Mom," he said. "It's just that when he gets here he's going to want to spend the whole day trading stamps, and I really wanted to shoot some hoops this afternoon. It's finally so nice out."

"So what's the problem?" asked his mom. "Just tell Ralph you'd prefer to play ball with him today. I'm sure he won't mind."

Michael shook his head. "No way Mom!" he exclaimed. "All Ralph cares about are dumb stamps. Whenever we get together that's all we talk about. I'm sorry I ever mentioned to him that I had a stamp collecting kit. When he said he had one too, I pretended to be into it. I never got around to telling him that I just happened to win mine as a raffle prize and that I thought stamps were boring. Now Ralph thinks they're my favorite thing in the world. He said that stamp collecting is a mature hobby. Now if I tell him I'd rather play ball than trade stamps, he'll think I'm a baby."

Mrs. Jacobs stopped for a moment in the midst of her frantic preparations. Looking at her son, she said, "Gee, Mike, I understand how it might be difficult to admit to Ralph that you're really not so interested in stamp collecting as you told him you were, but isn't it better than spending three hours doing something you can't stand?"

Michael just snorted and stomped away. He put his basketball away on the shelf. "I guess I won't be needing you today," he muttered.

A little while later the doorbell rang. The guests had arrived. Aunt Esther was carrying her usual colorfully gift-wrapped box of assorted chocolates and sure enough, cousin Ralph was holding a bulging stamp album.

The two mothers made their way into the den amidst pleasant conversation, leaving the two boys to play by themselves in the parlor.

"Have a seat Ralph" said Michael forcing a smile. "I'll just go get my albums and we can start trading right away."

As Michael turned to leave the room he didn't notice his cousin look out toward the open window and sigh.

Soon the boys settled in to their usual dull routine.

After a while, Michael just couldn't take it anymore. *I don't care what he'll think about me*, he thought, *I just can't keep pretending to be something I'm not.*

Michael cleared his throat. "Er ... Ralph," he said hesitantly.

The other boy lifted his eyes from the stamp he had been examining.

"Umm ... It's so nice out. Would you mind a lot if we maybe took a break from the stamps today and ... uh ... we went outside and shot a few hoops?" Michael anxiously waited for his cousin's reaction. But he was amazed to see Ralph's face light up and break out into a big smile.

"Really? Sure! I'd much rather play ball!" he said. "I wanted to suggest the same thing, but I was afraid you'd be upset. I know how much you love to trade stamps."

The boys raced to put away the stamps and practically dashed out of the house. It turned out that Ralph was a really good ball player. After the game, the boys grabbed a cold drink.

"Ralph, I have a confession to make," Michael said. "I don't really like collecting stamps. I just figured you were into it so I went along."

His cousin laughed. "That's funny! I always thought the same thing about you!"

The boys shook their heads and had a good laugh about how each of them had only been trading stamps because he thought that's what the other one liked to do.

We love mingle drinks

Sparkling grape juice

Pinacoloda

Shirleytemple

Non alcoholic wine

ALTERNATIVES

If we don't indulge on Purim, how will we fulfill Rava's opinion? (See "But Aren't We Supposed to..." below.) Well, first of all, it's not so clear cut that Rava's opinion needs fulfilling. (Refer to the Ran cited there, and others.) If you really feel you must, here are two non-alcoholic options:



1) According to some *poskim*, taking a nap fulfills the concept of not knowing the difference between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai." If you're sleeping, you certainly don't know anything about either Haman or Mordechai!

2) The *gematria* (numerical value) of the phrase "Arur Haman" ("Cursed is Haman") is 502. The *gematria* of "Baruch Mordechai" ("Blessed is Mordechai") is also 502. Try to work it out

yourself. Make a mistake? Arguably, one can fulfill this concept simply by being bad at math!

So what can we do on Purim if we're not drinking? Here are a number of alternatives (some of which are mitzvot and must be done anyway!):

Hear the Megilla (twice – once in the evening and once in the day) • Give *matanos l'evyonim* (gifts of money to the needy) • Give *miñloach manos* (gifts of food to friends) • Eat *miñloach manos* • Cook the Purim *seudah* • Eat the Purim *seudah* • Sing • Wear a costume • Perform acts of *chesed* (kindness) • Write a Purim *shpiel* (humorous play) • Perform in a Purim *shpiel* • Watch a Purim *shpiel* • Collect money for *tzedaka* • Write and sing *gramen* (humorous lyrical poems) • Go to an NCSY program • Take a nap • Go to *mincha*

You'll find that there's lots more you can do, intoxicating-substance free, if you put your mind to it!

What an odd story! And why is it recounted at this particular point in the Talmud?

Some opinions (such as the Ran) say that this story is brought specifically to refute Rava's opinion about drinking on Purim.

The Maharscha explains that Rabbah did not literally slit Rav Zeira's throat. Rather, he kept plying Rav Zeira with drinks until he became sick, which is just as dangerous. Rav Zeira's refusal to return the following year was to avoid an environment conducive to over-indulgence, a potentially fatal situation.

We see that alcohol can place one in a variety of dangerous situations, ranging from alcohol poisoning to foolhardy behavior. (This could come in the form of a knife to the throat or an impaired driver at the wheel.) If you get

behind the wheel after having even a few, you could G-d forbid accomplish what Haman failed to do: destroying a Jew! Rav Zeira's advice is the best advice: Just don't go there. (See "Alternatives" above.)

Overcompensation

You'll notice that we've only been talking about (a) Purim and (b) wine. That's because that's the only holiday/beverage combination that even needs addressing. There is no concept of ever "having" to drink vodka, beer or scotch, or of "needing" to drink on Simchas Torah. Anyone who thinks there are any such religious obligations is kidding himself. (What about wine on Pesach? See "Breaking News!" on the other side.)

no matter how great, is immune to the effects of alcohol.

A famous Midrash on this section (*Yalkut Shimoni, Noah 61*) describes the effects of wine on a person, using the analogy of different animals (appropriate for Noah's). When a person starts out drinking wine, he feels as innocent as a lamb and as complacent as a sheep. After he's had a few, he feels as if he's strong like a lion. When he's gone too far, he becomes like a pig, wallowing in his own filth. When drunk, he is like a monkey. He thinks he's smart, witty and clever, when in reality he is a buffoon, being laughed at by others for his idiocy.

Here are some other thoughts Chazal (our Sages) expressed about wine:

- Rebbi said: there are two things that cannot coexist: wine and the service of Hashem. (*Zohar Chadash, Noah 22b*)
- What was the tree from which Adam ate? Rabbi Meir said, it was the grapevine, because nothing brings grief into this world like wine. (*Brachos 40a*)
- It is impossible to serve G-d with illness, irreverence, and drunkenness. (*Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:20*)

But Aren't We "Supposed" to Drink on Purim?

Many people cite the famous statement of Rava in the Talmud (*Megilla 7b*) that one should drink on Purim until one can't tell the difference between "Cursed

is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai." Fewer people relate the incident that is described immediately after:

One year, Rabbah hosted Rav Zeira for the Purim *seudah* (the festive meal). They overdid the drinking and got drunk. Rabbah got so drunk that he cut Rav Zeira's throat, mortally wounding him. Rabbah prayed and Rav Zeira recuperated.

The following year, Rabbah asked Rav Zeira if he would like to join him for Purim *seudah* again. Rav Zeira wisely declined. When Rabbah asked why, Rav Zeira responded, "One cannot rely on a miracle happening a second time."



SOME TORAH REASONS NOT TO DRINK

- We are required to guard our lives and our health. No one would object to your refraining from an addictive substance that impairs your judgment!
- *Dina d'malchuta dina* – one is obligated by *halacha* (Jewish law) to follow to the laws of the land. Therefore, it is forbidden for minors to violate legal age limits on alcohol consumption.
- It is forbidden to *daven* while under the influence of alcohol.

What's Really Important

"Your love is more delightful than wine" (*Shir HaShirim* 1:2). According to the *Sforno*, Hashem gave us the Torah and *mitzvos* with His love. These are more precious than wine which may make one feel good, but is merely a worldly pleasure.

The joy of wine is not at all like the joy of Torah and *mitzvos*! When wine leaves a person, sorrow immediately enters his heart.... This is not the case with Torah, which is the pleasure and joy of mankind both in This World and in the Next World. (*Midrash Tanchuma, Parshas Shemini*)


Being a Friend

Did you ever hear the saying "friends don't let friends drive drunk?" Judaism has a *mitzvah* that's worded very similarly. The Torah tells us (*Vayikra* 19:16), "You must not stand idly by your friend's blood." In other words, if another person is in danger, we must try to save him, even from himself. This could entail taking someone's car keys away or stopping them from drinking more when they've had enough already.



The Talmud tells us (*Shevuot* 39a) that *kol Yisroel areivim zeh bazeh*, all Jews are interconnected. Other places (including Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:37) render it "*kol Yisroel areivim zeh lazeh*," all Jews are responsible for one another. No matter how you slice it, everyone's actions affect everyone else and we have a responsibility to watch out for each other.

Breaking News!

A non-alcoholic version of wine is now widely available! It's called "grape juice" and it can be used as a wine substitute for Kiddush, at the Seder and in other situations where one might otherwise use wine! Grape juice is available in a wide selection of varieties, including red, white, sparkling, peach-flavored, *mevushal*, *non-mevushal* and many more at supermarkets nationwide! Ask for it by name! (Make sure you look for the  or some other reliable *kashrus* symbol!)

For more information, visit the NCSY Drug and Alcohol Information Center online at www.ncsy.org

Let's see a few other sources.

Duties of the Heart, Fifth Treatise on Devotion 5:2

He masks himself as your friend, and pretends to show love. He enters in your inner circle of close friends and advisors.

Peninei Halakhah, Zemanim 16:16:2

Many people customarily wear masks and costumes on Purim.

Peninei Halakhah, Days of Awe 10:13:5

However, this, too, can be understood in a deeper way: The evil forces are elevated to a higher level and remove their masks, showing that they, too, want what is best for the world.

Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, I; Between Yesterday and Tomorrow 6:25

Those who in their heart belong to the camp of evil, must be forced to take off their masks. This is an essential of victory.

Redeeming Relevance; Exodus, Preface 1

To learn Torah requires human authenticity, to stand in front of a mirror and ask oneself the devastating question of who one really is, without masks and artificialities.

Job 24:15

The sinner watches for twilight, Thinking, "No one will glimpse me then." He masks his face.

