



# A PURIM FILLED WITH LIFE, LOSS AND LOVE

My Dear Friends,

This will be a difficult Purim for me. I am still within the year of mourning for my father and stepping into Purim with all of its associations of joy and happiness feels discordant. It is uncomfortable for me to think about celebrating Purim in such an emotional state of loss. What is Purim supposed to mean for someone experiencing sadness?

This very personal question has compelled me to revisit the sources and re-think my understanding of Purim. In our tradition, Purim is, of course, identified with joy, but it is unlike that of other chagim. One

example is the way in which the holidays interrupt and cancel shiva for a mourner, as opposed to Purim in which shiva still persists. Why this difference?

For me, this distinction points to the very character of the day. The Jewish holidays, in general, are designed to remove us from the banal and pedestrian structure of day-to-day life. Everything stops. We don't work. Our tefilot are different and we are together with family and friends.

Purim, however, is different. Rather than removing us from the world, Purim is a time when we see the world as it truly is — with all of its

jagged edges and contradictions. It's a world in which heroes and villains, like Mordechai and Haman, are confused. A world in which even after the redemption we remain citizens of Shushan and "servants of Achashverosh." We do not say Hallel on Purim, the Talmud explains, because we still live in the world of Purim.

In this sense, Purim helps us experience joy even in a world of unredeemed imperfection. In his writings on Purim (Purim #30), Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner asks us to imagine a sick person battling an illness who eventually finds a cure. After recovery,

that individual makes a *seudat hoda'ah*, a special meal to show appreciation to Hashem for overcoming this difficult challenge. Then Rabbi Hutner asks us to imagine someone whose sickness is that he is emotionally hindered from experiencing joy. This individual also makes a *seudat hoda'ah* upon recovery. But the happiness at such a celebration is different — it is the celebration of the capacity to rejoice.

Purim, he writes, is a celebration of our capacity to rejoice even in a broken world. We do not pretend that all is perfect. We recognize and admit our mortality and limitations. We give *mishloach manot* and *matanot le'evyonim* which reflect the gifts of

our family and friends, the blessings of helping others in need and the support we experience in community. Like with the story of Purim, Hashem is our true support and is at times not overtly revealed. We need to seek God to experience God. And we read the Megillah during the day which reminds us that, like Mordechai and Esther, we, too, can make a difference in the grand story of our people, bringing redemption to the Jewish nation and spreading goodness throughout society. While it's not our personal responsibility to perfect the world, we can move it one step closer. We do make a difference, in the eyes of our loving God and the lives of

those around us.

It might not all be okay. Not every story seems to have a happily-ever-after. But we have the capacity to rejoice.

The other holidays segment a section of time and take us out of our lives so that the mourning of shiva is cancelled as it is naturally incongruent. But Purim is not a step away from real life, it is real life. And in life we can laugh amidst the tears, and we can smile even when there is a deep void and we can share a toast with our friends to the memory of the ones who we will always carry with us in our hearts.

	TORAT EMET	TORAT CHAIM	TORAT ADAM	TORAT CHESED	TORAT ZION
 <p><b>CORE TORAH VALUES</b></p> <p>Yeshiva University is a unique ecosystem of educational institutions and resources that prepares the next generation of leaders with Jewish values and market-ready skills to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives, endowing them with both the will and wherewithal to transform the Jewish world and broader society for the better.</p> <p>YU.EDU/VALUES</p>	<p><b>אמת</b> TRUTH</p> <p>We believe in <b>truth</b>, and humanity's ability to <b>discover</b> it.</p> <p>The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.</p> <p>The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.</p>	<p><b>חיים</b> LIFE</p> <p>We believe in bringing values to <b>life</b>.</p> <p>Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.</p> <p>When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.</p>	<p><b>אדם</b> INFINITE HUMAN WORTH</p> <p>We believe in the <b>infinite worth</b> of each and every human being.</p> <p>Judaic tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.</p> <p>The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.</p>	<p><b>חסד</b> COMPASSION</p> <p>We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in <b>compassion</b>.</p> <p>Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.</p>	<p><b>ציון</b> REDEMPTION</p> <p>We believe that <b>humanity's purpose</b> is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.</p> <p>In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.</p> <p>The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.</p>



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