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Coffee with the Cantor Jewish Influence on Secular Society

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Purim and Secular Society

From Jerusalem Post

Purim, the ultimate juxtaposition of tradition and self-expression, transformed Jerusalem's normally staid urban landscape into a Fellini-like street party Monday – replete with a psychedelic mosaic that Timothy Leary would undoubtedly have considered inspired. Indeed, as a young woman dressed as Satan danced with Pippi Longstocking, a scarecrow and Charlie Brown on a balcony two stories above, hundreds of young and old revelers converged on Nissim Bahar Street in Nahlaot to dance, drink and act without inhibition. “You can be whatever you want today and celebrate,” said Amit, dressed as a honeybee. “I’m secular, but to me this is a very holy day.” “You become yourself today by expressing yourself,” added his girlfriend Naama, also dressed as a honeybee. “That’s the beauty of Purim: the opportunity to be whoever you want.” Liran, a bearded man dressed as Cleopatra – including fireengine- red lipstick and aqua eye shadow – nursed a bottle of Goldstar beer and smoked a cigarette while leaning on a parked car, as a baby with blue hair in a chicken costume was pushed in a stroller by his parents. Asked what makes Jerusalem’s Purim celebration unique, Liran noted the city’s “special spirit,” and temporary blurring of lines between the generally divided secular and ultra-Orthodox communities. “If you compare Jerusalem to other cities today, there is a special spirit and mood here today,” he said. “Even if you compare our celebration to the haredim’s, there’s not much of a difference. We all drink, dress up, dance to music and give gifts to the poor.” Liran continued, “The only difference is that they all read the megila.” Meanwhile, a middle-aged Parisian couple visiting the country for the week took in the spectacle with a video camera and a clear sense of awe. “It’s a very, very interesting party because of the costumes,” said the woman, who requested anonymity. “It’s similar to Carnival in Paris, but they don’t really celebrate that as much in France anymore.” She added that the communal and ubiquitous revelry made Jerusalem’s celebration special. “I think it’s full of hope because they know how to preserve their traditions,” she said. “That’s the most important thing any group of people can do.” Betty, who dressed as Superman, said the holiday’s sense of escapism was liberating, as she danced in the middle of the closed-off street with her friend Hadar, adorned in a Batman costume. “The idea of Purim is to be something in your life that you can’t be in the real world,” said Betty. “It’s very freeing.” Sharon, a mother of two young children, wore a bright blue wig as her five-year-old, Alon, sat on the roof of a car casually eating a chocolate bar while dressed in a mouse costume. “It’s just so nice to see other people having fun, smiling and feeling the holiday,” she said. “Everybody’s happy. That’s why it’s so nice to go out – to feel the good vibrations.” Shira, a secular Jew dressed as a Power Ranger, said she connected with the holiday



because it enables her to observe tradition and have fun at the same time. “It makes it easier for nonreligious people to connect to their past,” she said. Her friend Rona, a law student who said she just came from “a very important” job interview at one of the city’s top firms, finished adjusting her fairy costume. “I wanted to rush here because this is the funnest holiday in Jerusalem,” she said. “This is the one day that makes it better than Tel Aviv!” A few blocks away, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat, who – with his wife and a friend – joined the celebration (albeit in a track suit), said he enjoyed watching secular and Orthodox residents celebrate in an indistinguishable manner. “Everyone’s enjoying Purim in the same way – you see ultra-Orthodox and secular people all dressed up,” he said with a smile, before noting the historical import of the holiday to all Jews. “And don’t forget that when we read the megila, there have not been that many changes in the world. People are still out to get us,” he continued. “So it’s important to be together and celebrate as one.”

From “yahsword.blogger”

PURIM - Biblical or Secular Holiday?

It has been observed that many Sabbatarian congregations and Sacred Names assemblies have been able to discern the pagan origins of Christian holy days. But there appears to be blindness when it comes to purely Jewish/Judaic holy days and festivals. Referring, in other words, those days which are considered holy or required by Jewish or Judaic custom and not found among the commandments of Yahweh. One of these is Purim, so let’s take a look at it and then see what Yahweh has to say.

SOURCES

To Be A Jew, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin –

Page 261 – *“The most prominent ritual feature in the observance of the holiday is to attend the synagogue on Purim eve to listen to the reading of the Scroll of Esther, more popularly called the Megillah.”*

“Both men and women are required to listen to the reading of the Megillah.”

Page 262 – *“Since Talmudic times, Purim has been the day when the usual restraints against excessive drinking of intoxicating beverages were relaxed. ‘A person is required to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’ (Megillah 75), said the Sages.”*

Everyman’s Talmud, Abraham Cohen, **page 123** –

“...nothing spoken by a later prophet could in any way be in conflict with, and add to or detract from, the writings of Moses. ‘Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses spoke prophecies for Israel, and they neither deducted from nor added to what was written in the Torah, with the exception of the law to read the book of Esther on the Feast of Purim’ (Meg.14a).”



Purim is *“The feast which commemorates the escape of the Jews of Persia from the plot of Haman. All the laws of Judaism are traced to the Mosaic legislation, but obviously the regulation that the Book of Esther should be recited annually must be a later addition.”*

Biblical Literacy, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin –

Page 378 – *“The book of Esther informs us that it was Mordechai who established the holiday of Purim, to commemorate the destruction of Haman and of his plot to annihilate the Jews (9:20-23).”*

Page 491 – *“Later rabbinic authorities, who did add extra ordinances to those already legislated in the Torah, felt compelled to justify doing so with two rationales: First, gratitude to God necessitated establishing additional holidays (e.g., Purim and Hannuka) to express appreciation for God’s delivering His people from post-Torah dangers. Second, additional regulations were needed to guard against the possible violation of Torah laws.”*

Jewish Days, Francine Klagsbrun, **Page 106** –

“But wait! Did any of this Purim story really happen? Plenty of historians say it didn’t. They point out that while King Ahasuerus may have been the Persian king Xerxes I, who reigned from 486 to 465 C.C.E., no references to the events described in the Scroll of Esther exist in Persian sources. Furthermore, the names Esther and Mordechai sound suspiciously like those of the Babylonian gods Ishtar and Marduk, making it likely that our story is a retelling, maybe a parody, of some ancient folklore or myth. Some scholars argue that the whole megillah was invented, possibly during the Second Temple era, to give a Jewish slant to an old, popular spring festival.”

“The sages had their own problems with the Purim saga. What was this Jewish woman doing in a Persian king’s harem, changing her name from Hadassah to Esther, paying no attention to dietary laws, and hiding her identity? Worse still, why is there no reference to God in the entire Book of Esther – not a prayer for salvation when Esther calls for a public fast, not a prayer of thanksgiving when salvation does arrive?”

“They argued the matter back and forth, and finally agreed to accept Purim as a legitimate festival, although a minor one, on which work is permitted. They concluded that though the book appears to be secular, it was actually divinely inspired, perhaps more than any other biblical book. The only reason God is not mentioned in it is because God’s presence is hidden, working behind the scenes.”

“Without worrying about the holiday’s origins, Jews have accepted the rabbinic injunction and celebrated in high spirits, with carnivals, masquerades, and Purim shpiels – plays and poems that satirize the story and its characters. Even cross-dressing, men as women and women as men, is permitted on this day. Families gather on Purim afternoon to eat a Purim se’udah, a hearty meal that in Ashkenazic homes may include triangular meat-filled pastries called kreplah, and end with the festival’s



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favorite delicacy, hamantaschen.”

Gates of the Seasons – editor – Peter S. Knobel – Central Conference of American Rabbi's – **page 138**

“Purim is the one occasion when men and women are permitted to wear each others' clothes.” - Rama on Orach Chayim 696.8”

<http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/Orach-Chayim>

Encyclopedia > Orach Chayim -- Orach Chayim is a section of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher's compilation of Halakha (Jewish law)

Celebrate the Holiday, from <http://jewishappleseed.org/apple/purim.htm>

“Purim is the happiest of all Jewish holidays, when having fun is not only permitted, it is commanded. In fact, we are commanded to become so filled with silliness that we can't tell the difference between ‘Blessed is Mordechai’ and ‘Cursed is Haman’.”

“But Purim would hardly be complete without its own brand of entertainment, called a spiel (pronounced shpeel). A tradition for hundreds of years, Purim spiels typically include humorous plays, skits, and music. Sometimes the spiel is a comic interpretation of the traditional Purim story using modern characters and settings. Often, members of a particular community use the spiel as an opportunity to poke fun at the people and places around them. The audience may wonder whether the Purim spiel is all in fun or instead, the honest truth. Are the actors merely poking fun, or are they saying what they really mean? Do our masks and costumes conceal who we are, or reveal our true selves? No one really knows. It's all part of the fun and meaning of Purim.”

The World Holiday Book: Celebrations for Every Day of the Year, by Anneli Rufus –

“With its raucousness, relentless clowning, and borderline-bawdy theatrics and masquerades, Purim is the most unbuttoned of Jewish holidays, inadvertently echoing Mardi Gras and other pre-Lenten carnivals occurring at this same time of year. Some anthropologists hold that Purim is no less than a descendant of the orgiastic Babylonian New Year, on which Marduk and his fellow gods were said to gamble by casting lots (purim in the Babylonian language). The consensus, however, is that Purim commemorates one Queen Esther, who with her cousin Mordecai, thwarted a massacre that had been engineered by the anti-Semitic royal adviser, Haman. (Haman, it is said, ended up on the gallows.)”

From Prehistoric Cave Art to Your Cookie Pan: Tracing the Hamantasch Herstory, Rabbi Susan Schnu, from <http://www.lilith.org/pdfs/lilithpurim.pdf>

“Purim's origins, scholars generally agree, derive from an ancient full-moon pre-



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spring Persian holiday; Esther is descended from the Babylonian Ishtar (who derives from Inanna) and Mordechai from the Babylonian Marduk. (These gods are allied against the Elamite goddess, Vashti, and the god Humman, that is, Haman.) Ishtar, a universal lifecycle goddess, also rules the morning star and evening star, so Esther's Hebrew name, Hadassah, means 'myrtle,' which has star-shaped flowers, and leaves which are vulvate or boat-shaped, again that fertility symbol that goes back over 30,000 years to engravings on cave walls."

"What is a hamantasch? A sacred vulva filled with black seeds. A food, source of nourishment, which we make with our hands reflecting our (women's) felt sense of self-containment, of creativity and generativity."

"Ancient images of goddesses reveal that certain parts of the body – breasts, vulva, belly, buttocks – were believed to be holy, combining biological functions with processes of spiritual transformation. Hamantaschen remind us that the image of the female body was humanity's first conceptualization of the workings of the cosmos. The Earth was a mother, fecund like us."

"When do we eat hamantaschen? At Purim, as Earth herself awakens from dormancy and begins again her sacred spring cycle of life. We honor the Earth's body for it is our own. The sacred is not to be found on a pilgrimage. It is within us. If we treat our bodies as enemies, we doom ourselves to experiences of an amputated God."

Astarte, from the Spiral Goddess website: <http://www.spiralgoddess.com/Astarte.html>

"Astarte is also known as Astarat and Astoreth. She is an incarnation of Ishtar and Inanna. This Semitic Goddess was worshipped by the Syrians, Canaanites (today called Palestinians), Phoenicians, Egyptians and other Semitic Tribes. King Solomon built a Temple to Her as Astoreth, near Jerusalem."

"Astarte was worshipped as many things, to the Egyptians, She was honored as a Goddess of War and tenacity, to the Semites, She was a Goddess of Love and Fertility. Among the Greeks She was transposed into the Goddess of Love Aphrodite. In the Bible, She is referred to as 'the abomination'. Considering Her widespread devotion in Biblical times, the attempts to discredit the Goddess are not surprising."

"The Bull and the Dove are especially sacred to Astarte and Astoreth. The Goddess is often pictured wearing horns. Astoreth is sometimes pictured wearing the head of a Bull. The Dove is associated with many Middle-Eastern Goddess rites. A Dove perches atop many Asheras, (tall moon poles) that marked the 'High Places' where outdoor Goddess rituals were frequently held."

Astarte, from <http://www.themystica.com/mythical-folk/articles/astarte.html>



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“Astarte, the ancient Phoenician great goddess of fertility, motherhood, and war, is the counterpart of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, and is one of the oldest Middle Eastern aspects of the great Goddess, dating to the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Tammuz also is identified as her son/consort as he is with Ishtar. According to legend Astarate descended to earth as a fiery star, landing near Byblos in a lake at Alphaca, the site where the original Tammuz is said to have died.”

“Her other counterparts are Isis, Hathor of Egypt, Kali of India, and Aphrodite and Demeter of Greece. However, the mother goddess in the Ras Shamra texts appears as Anat, Athirat, and Atthart, or Astrate.”

“Athirata, ‘the lady of the sea,’ appears to be the consort of El, the equivalent of the Hebrew god Yahweh. Her role was restricted to fertility. Astarte, ‘the queen of heaven,’ was almost as fierce as Anat but less remote than Athirat. The Hebrews knew her as the goddess of the Sidonians, whom they worshiped. This angered Yahweh who complained to the prophet Jeremiah. At Mizpah temples of Yahweh and Astarte were erected side by side, while in Upper Egypt the Hebrews considered the goddess the divine consort still in the fifth century BC. The same as in the temples of Ishtar and Inanna, the sacred marriage and temple prostitution were prominent features of the cult, of which Yahweh also complained.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Are these traditions of Purim from Yahweh or from man?
- Who gave the command to read the book of Esther on Purim?
- How does Yahweh look at intoxication?
- Should we be concerned about a holiday's origins?
- Are the quotes from the children's book any different than teaching children about Santa Claus or the Easter bunny?
- What were people thinking to allow their daughters to go into the king's harem? They would never leave it.
- Would the threat of this annihilation have been a possibility if the Jews had returned to their own land at the end of the 70 years of the captivity?
- Is this holiday to commemorate the salvation of the nation by Yahweh? If so, why is he not mentioned?
- Is the holiday for Yahweh or for the people to continue on in their old pagan rituals?
- The sages agreed to accept this holiday as legitimate. Based on what?
- How could Mordechai be a member of the Sanhedrin? That was in Jerusalem, and he was in Babylon.
- Are we supposed to “hide” from the world or to be a light to the world?
- Did Yahweh give the rabbinic authorities instructions to add holidays? Or did they take it upon themselves?
- Do we want to follow the example set by early Israel & Judah? They went into captivity for adding the worship of other gods & traditions in their worship of Yahweh.